

THE SACRED DRAMAS OF
GEORGE BUCHANAN

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Translated into English Verse

BY

ARCHIBALD BROWN

Minister of the Parish of Legerwood

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P R E F A C E

IN making this translation I have had before me only two editions of the Latin text, viz., that of 1615 (Andro Hart, Edinburgh), and that of 1687 (H. Wetstein, Amsterdam). Both give the bare text without note or comment; and, apart from typographical errors, they are in complete accord.

Two metrical translations of these Dramas are known to me to have appeared; one of them in 1870 (Moodie Miller, Edinburgh), and the other a few years ago (Gardner, Paisley). Of the latter I cannot speak, never having seen it, and having indeed avoided seeing it, my own translation being by that time practically complete.

The earlier version is a careful and creditable piece of work; but as a poetic rendering it suffers from its rigid literalism. The translator has shown great self-restraint in adhering resolutely and at all costs to his text, and in firmly refusing to round off a thought, or place it in a setting somewhat more in unison with the genius or idiom of the English tongue.

It humbly seems to me that literalism carried so far

as this defeats its own purpose, and that the resultant version, instead of being rigorously faithful, may sometimes be the very reverse. Take, *e.g.*, the adjuration *per Deum!* (meaning, *in God's name!*); represent it, bluntly and *tout court*, by the two corresponding English words; and what have you? You have a rendering true to the letter, false to the sense; and what is in your text a solemn adjuration becomes in your hands a profane expletive. The instance is not imaginary; but it is probably an extreme one, and may be singular of its kind. The moral is, that a translator requires to move with reasonable freedom, and is likely to do greater justice both to his author and to himself by not tying himself too tightly to the literal word.

To give word for word, or phrase for phrase, or line for line, has not been my aim. What I have honestly tried to do is to give the force and tone and spirit of the original, without departing from the written text more than might allowably be done. If I may venture so to speak, I have teased out Buchanan's web, and woven up the wool again as best I could. The material is essentially his; the texture, the colouring, and the effect, so far as I could reproduce them, are his also.

To what extent I have succeeded or failed in this attempt, I must leave to others to decide. No one can be more sensible than I am of its imperfections—failures to hit off the precise shades of meaning—failures, if not to compress, at least not to aggravate the undeniable *longueurs* that are but too frequent in the speeches—

failures, in the Choral Odes, to repress the occasional indulgence in an archaic word or in words which if not obsolete are obsolescent. For many of these faults—and the list might no doubt be enlarged—there is, I fear, no defence; but let me say, at least of some of them:—

*Sunt delicta tamen quibus ignovisse velimus:
Nam neque chordæ sonum reddit quem vult manus et mens,
Poscentique gravem persæpe remittit ænium,
Nec semper feriet quodeumque minabitur arcus.*

The neglect into which Buchanan has fallen among his countrymen of the present day—Quatercentenary Celebrations notwithstanding—is surprising; but it is beyond dispute. A richly endowed man of genius, one of the foremost scholars and admittedly the greatest poet of his time, his hold upon the affection and the admiration of his country might have been supposed to be assured. But it has not been so. A dark eclipse rests upon his name; so all but total, one cannot think of it without feeling that a great injustice has been done. Worse fate could hardly have befallen him, unless it be the grotesque distortion of him long current among the peasantry of his own country, with whom he passed familiarly for a rough jester and Court Fool.

This shameful caricature of him probably exists no longer; and one may hope with some degree of confidence that the eclipse which rests upon him, now perhaps at its darkest, will to a large extent pass away and permit the real lustre of his name to shine out again.

I have no thought that this little book will contribute in any appreciable degree to that result; but, in sending it forth, I have at least the hope that those into whose hands it may chance to come will not think less of Buchanan after they have read it than they did before.

A. B.

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JEPHTHAH, OR, THE VOW

PROLOGUE

Spoken by an ANGEL

From heaven, the throne of the Eternal King,
To earth and to the homes of Israel
I come, a minister of God; and here
I fold my wings upon the sacred soil
Promised of old to Abraham and his seed—
A soil predestined as the seat of power
And wide dominion over Gentile lands,
So had the chosen race inviolate kept
The sacred league. But now for some sad years
This soil has shuddering felt the hostile tramp
Of Ammonite invasion, and endured
All sorrows, miseries, and cruelties
The victor may inflict, the vanquished fear.
Subdued and broken by calamity,
The race rebellious have but now begun
To reverence anew their fathers' God—
Have come, by taking thought, to recognize,
And, recognized, to ridicule and scorn
As lying mockeries of Deity
The rites of idol-worship gross and vile.

Though late and wandering long, yet once again
They have returned to God.—But measure due
The mind of man knows never to observe;
Success elates it; and the more profuse
The bounty of God has been of its rich gifts
The deeper the security that wraps
In blinding folds the eyelids of the soul;
While pride and arrogance, the evil birth
Of vain imaginings, incite to acts
That are unwise and hurtful. As a steed
Refractory and savage, if it feel
A moment slackened the controlling hand,
Plunges and swerves, resisting violently
Its rider's will, nor but with difficulty
Subdued by biting curb and blood-stained spur
Resumes its duty and obeys the rein:
Even so this people, froward and stiffnecked,
To evil ever prone, if but a while
The sounding scourge has rested, straightway choose
New gods, and give themselves to alien rites
And follow strange idolatries. And thus
The Father of all, in his benignity,
Breaks their proud spirit, risen to such offence
By unrestraint, sending them war or dearth,
Or deadly pestilence to taint the air;
And tames their wild revolting. And again,
Lest trust in him should perish utterly,
Crushed out by troubles in succession long,
He sends them prophets, warlike leaders sends,

Deliverers and restorers, to regain
Lost Truth and Freedom; to strike off the chains
Of galling servitude, and bring them back
To know and serve the Lord in hallowed rites
As in the pristine days.—Thus at this time
The invading Ammonite he has stirred up
Against a people in revolt, who have
Forsaken God's commands and sold themselves
To godless vanities. Benignant still,
And his just wrath restraining, he has sent
A warrior to deliver them—not found
High placed in the proud roll of powerful chiefs;
Not great from the great retinue that crowd
His ample hall; nor stoutly confident
In the strong, trusty arm of valiant sons:
Not such, but, driven from his native fields,
The banished Jephthah, born in infamy,
Despised and hated by his father's sons,
Cast out in scorn, recalled when peril rose.
From such ignoble and unhonoured source
Deliverance came, so ordered from on high
That this proud race might nowise arrogate
To their own arms a victory wrought of God;
And Ammon too might know his sword had shone
Victorious hitherto in stricken fields,
Not from the puissance that wielded it,
But as the avenging weapon of God's wrath.
Further, lest Jephthah, he too, should aspire
To measure his own prowess by the event

Of battle, and presume on his success,
Full soon domestic sorrow shall bedim
His shining victory. Triumph and woe shall meet,
And woe shall triumph. Conqueror of Ammon,
Low shall he lie, by one sad death o'erthrown;
And his proud heart in utter grief shall break.
For, belting on his sword at setting forth
On this high enterprise, he vowed a vow
That if on battlefield he should prevail
Against the treacherous foe, then whatso'er
Should first come forth to meet him from his door—
To meet him, home returned with victory—
Should be the Lord's, and on his altar burn.

Woe to thee, hapless Jephthah! woe to thee!
How great a load of misery impends!
What sorrows shall engulf thee! And the hope
Of joy so near approaching, how it fools
Thy fond credulity! Sole child of thine
That guards for thee thy name transmissible,
Thy daughter first shall meet thee, to acclaim
With dance and sounding timbrel thy return—
Her warlike sire returned with victory!
O hapless maid, who but must weep for thee,
Too dearly to repay with bleeding veins
The joy of that proud moment snatched too soon!

And, lo, the mother sadly comes abroad,
Whom hideous dreams have scared the whole night
long
With scenes of horror; and beside her comes

Her daughter, both betraying in their mien
And gait and brooding silence the alarm
And anxious trouble that perturb their breast.

STORGE, IRUS

STO. Ah me! my heart yet trembles in dismay,
My mind is filled with horror, and my voice
Obstructed labours for mere utterance,
And scarce my lips can give to airy words
Their evanescent form—so full of dread
The visions of the night have been to me,
And fearful dreams have roused in me a sad
And wakeful trouble, and my anxious heart
Beats wearily beneath a weight of care.
But, O thou Monarch of the shining sky,
Supreme in power, avert on Israel's foes
This omen of deep woe and deadly harm;
And unto me and to my child extend
Thy grace and pity—to my child, alas,
Left the sole hope and comfort of her house,
And prop of my decayed and waning years.

IRU. Dear mother, bode with better cheer, and far
Cast from thee thoughts that make thee sick at heart
With causeless grief. Bethink thee; thou art sad
And apprehensive, and thy troubled mind

Mocks thee with idle fancies. O heed not
An idle dream, but give to tranquil thoughts
Re-entrance to thy bosom, and forget
These airy phantoms.

STO. Would I might forget!

But oft as I remember, still afresh
My fears start up in me; terror takes hold
Upon me; and before mine eyes anew
Passes the evil-boding dream I dreamed,
And chills my heart with horror.—Stillness soft
And slumberous had already couched in rest
All breathing things, and night had ushered in
A voiceless silence, when methought I saw,
A pack of wolves at utmost speed impelled,
Maddened with hunger, every eye agleam,
Their jaws wide-gaping flecked with blood and foam,
Sweep savagely and with impetuous rush
On a defenceless flock, no shepherd near.
Alert, and instantly, a faithful dog,
Intrepid guardian of the trembling fold,
Rushed forth and drove the wolves away—and then,
Returning to the timid flock that still
Panted in wildest terror, suddenly,
From where I held it in my folded arms,
A trembling lamb he snatched, and with his fangs
Remorselessly its quivering flesh he tore.

O radiant Sun! O Moon that dost illumine
With wandering torch the sun-deserted sky!
O Stars that to the night-hushed world return,

In glittering beauty trooping into view!
And thou, O Night, that on thy raven wings
Bringst dreams to slumbering mortals, and dost know
The anxious trouble thou hast brought to me!
Ye Powers of light and gloom that rule our lives!
If at this hour some dread disaster hang
Impending o'er my daughter, and the voice
Of Destiny thus warn me it is near—
O, ere it fall, bring down this wretched head,
Down to the dark and silent realm of death,
While yet my fear hath hope, and hope and fear
Are in uncertain conflict, and my soul
Knows not the dread reality to be.

IRN. O mother, why wilt thou oppress thy mind
Thus miserably with anguish and alarm,
And by thy grief augment the grief of all,
And reawaken bitter cares and fears?
Rather, let all lamenting pass from thee,
And proudly welcome him on his return,
My father, who—unless I be deceived
By a vain augury I seem to hear—
Speeds on his way, enriched with noble spoils,
And bringing home with him a warrior's fame,
With endless honour to his race and land.

STO. Not such has been the tenor of my life
Since ever I have lived. Can I recall
A time exempt from troubles and from tears?
Grief has been with me still since first I hung
Upon my mother's breast. My youth beheld

The subjugation of my native land,
The fierce incursion of barbaric hordes,
Tracked with a desolation; cattle driven
From the fields they roamed in; the rich soil untilled,
Unsown, unharvested; the homesteads burned;
The quiet hamlets smoking to the skies
And sinking in red ruin; while the blood
Of our brave countrymen in vain was shed
Though shed in torrents; and the cruel sword
Stayed not at them, but turned its ruffian edge
On mothers and their babes, on young and old,
In ruthless massacre. Part of my life,
Tranquil and undisturbed, there hath not run.
As ripple chases ripple on the pool,
Or billowy surge that strikes the white sea-cliff
By billowy surge is followed; or as day,
Each day that comes, by its succeeding day
Is close pursued; even so our newer ills
Press hard upon the ills that have gone by:
The story of our misery knows no pause;
Grief follows grief, and woe companions woe.
My father and my brother both were slain
In the fierce strife of battle; sorrow-crazed,
My mother grew to age 'mid sighs and moans
And funeral wailings for her slaughtered kin;
And at this hour my husband is afield
In arms, and even now perchance his sword
Gleams in the thickest danger.—O my heart!
A worse thing yet than aught hath been looms dark

Upon me, dark and dreadful.

Irish.

Dread it not :

"The dread, excess of dread, that gives their force
To dark forebodings,

570.

O that I might hear

From Rumour's voice far-echoing o'er the land

The tidings of my lord at last returned.

His warrior ranks unbroken, and my hearth

Unsmitten by disaster.

Int.

Far away

Be doubting thoughts; he shall return unharmed.

The Power that moved him to those warlike toils

Will safe restore him, crowned with honours new,

CHORUS

Jordan, whose waters clear

Thy green-clad valley cheer,

Disparting with their eddying swell

The pasture fields of Israel.

Rich pastures over hill and holm

Where flocks and herds securely roam:

And thou, O palmy grove, whose plumes

Wave high on lightly tapered stem,

Fair when the radiant sun illumes,

Still fair 'mid winter's icy rheums,

Around our loved Jerusalem—

Thy leafy pride unript, unshed,

When myriad leaves lie strewn and dead:—

O shall the daystar's lucent ray
Never lead in the longed-for day—
Day that would banish all my woes
And bring my weary heart repose—
The day my gladdened eyes should see
My subjugated country free!
Free as the Jordan's rushing stream,
Or the high stars that o'er it gleam!

O land, for long ages beloved of the Lord,
Thy sons art enthralled to a nation abhorred;
And we whom the plague-smitten Pharaoh pursued
With chariots and horsemen, but never subdued;
Whom the sea waves, restraining their reflux wrath,
'Gulfed not as we marched on our perilous path;
Whom the wilds of Arabia, by ploughshare unriven,
And the giants of Anak, and towns walled to heaven,
Dismayed not—are now of an Ammonite horde,
The distardly slaves who would blench at a sword.

The deep disgrace, more than all other ill,
Pierces the soul, that we should tamely bear
A yoke so ignominious thus to fill,
Without so much of manhood as to dare
One blow our fallen freedom to repair.
But, O Almighty Father, who at will
Calmed the troubled sea, and when the sea
Is tranquil dost its sounding waves upheave
By wild cloud-whirling storms; and violently

The rock-fast basements of the world dost cleave
By shattering earthquakes, and restrainest leave,
When so thou pleasest, from the orbs that be
In the firmament, to speed on their career,
And stayest them—hear my soul's sad prayer, O hear!

At last, at last
Let our calamities suffice!
Thine anger past,
Lift up thy pitying eyes
Upon us, wearied and forlorn,
And with our country's sorrows torn:
O lift on thy afflicted race
The light of thy benignant face,
And in extremity
Our helper be!

If our guilt have merited
Vengeance so severe and dread;
If thus thou cast away from thee
The people thou didst choose to be
Thine own peculiar heritage—
So have our sins provoked thy rage—
O Father, if, as banished ones,
Lost to thy grace, thy wayward sons
Henceforth thou hold;
If, in anger unappeased,
Thou pity not the woes thou seest.

And wilt not hear the sad beseeching voice
Of those who in thy love, by thine own choice,

Were erst enrolled—

Let Syrian nor Ammonite
Nor Egypt's vengeful ruler smite
The stroke that shall thy judgment bring
Upon us, justly suffering;
Nor grant within thy hallowed pale
That sword profane should e'er prevail:
Rather arm thine own right hand
With thy dreadful thunder-brand,
And, flashing thy forked lightnings down,
Enwrap each godless tower and town

In fierce avenging flame;
Or let the earth, asunder cleft,
Swallow adown its yawning rift
All of our fateful name;
Or let the sea o'erleap its strand
And overwhelm this heaven-doomed land,
The rushing waves
Our graves.

Father, this prayer grant—
Lest the foe in his fierce pride
Our fallen power deride
And insolently vaunt;
Lest Ammon's blinded race who kneel
To idols formed with graver's steel

Of voiceless timber soon decayed,
And who with rites abhorred have laid
Upon thine altars fire profane
And victims impiously slain,
Should to their idol-gods repair
And, while thick incense loads the air,
Render thanks with echoing shout
For Hebrews slain in battle-rout.
And number to their own renown
Each driven dale and plundered town—
Ascribing to their own keen brand
The work of thy avenging hand,
Nor thinking that thine anger lent
Force to their falchion's swift descent.

Hark how their laughter rings!

Ha! shall they boast such things?

And say with lips insane

That when on battle-plain

They meet the people of the Lord
Foot to foot and sword to sword,
The ranks of Israel must quail,
Nor aid from Israel's God avail!

Ah wretched Ammon! canst thou count the tears

This mirth full soon will cause thee to let fall?
Soon in long moanings shall thy short-lived cheers

Be drowned for ever, hushed beyond recall.
The hour charged with thy doom doth swiftly speed—
Unless too much my soul presaging heed

A hope that fools me—even now is near,
And hastening fast, the time, thy time of fear ;
 When the oppressor's turn shall be
 To feel the woes of slavery ;
 And the hard yoke on others thrust
 Shall crush him, burdened, to the dust.
 Just God ! the righteous blood he shed
 Thou wilt not still unvisited
 Suffer thy sacred soil to stain ;
 Nor shall thine altars long remain
 Polluted by the rights abhorred
 Of aliens who know not the Lord.
 O may my life—if but the last,
 The extremest, part on earth that's past—
 Attain the period when once more
 Our fathers' God we may adore,
 Keeping each high solemnity
 As in the days when we were free ;
 And, mindful of the gracious hand
 That rescued our imperilled land,
 Round thine altar compassing
 A song to thee of triumph sing !

But, lo, a runner speeding with swift stride !
Mescemeth, from the host : 'tis even so :
I know him, and would fain his tidings know.

MESSENGER, CHORUS

Mrs. Daughters of ancient Abraham, all hail!
Meet offspring of your hallowed ancestry!
Is yonder house our leader Jephthah's, pray?
Or have I strayed in my uncertainty?

Cho. It is the house, and this his daughter too.
But if thy haste may tarry, say what cheer
Thou bringest with thee from the ranks of war.

Mrs. In sooth, my charge is to announce to all
What thou dost long to hear. The foe is fled,
Routed and chased; victory, spoil, renown
Are ours; in camp all's well: that is the sum.

Cho. How much in fewest words thou hast compressed!
But this, ere more, declare: Is thy report
Of things which thou hast seen, or merely heard?

Mrs. Things seen and done, true to the uttermost,
Are what I now rehearse; not idle tales
Gathered from Rumour's lips—for I was there,
And bore my part upon the stricken field.

Cho. How went the day? Fain would we hear at
large.

Mrs. Gladly this joy I bid you share with me.—

'Twas early morn, and scarce had rosy Dawn
Flushed with warm light the orient sky serene
When Ammon, too impetuous to endure
Chafing inaction, flooded wide the field
With horse and men and swift war-chariots

That raged with hideous din athwart the plain.
The swarming legions of their infantry,
Glittering in brass and steel, stood wide displayed,
By cohorts marshalled, while in front advanced
Squadrons of chariots menacingly armed
With scythe-like blades revolving with the wheels:
The horse streamed out in troops on either wing.

Meanwhile our host, holding the utmost heights
That bound the open plain, no warlike pomp
Nor forest of dense spears displayed; and yet
Stout-hearted were we, trusting in the aid
Of the Omnipotent, and resolute
To avenge our righteous quarrel. It was then
Our general between the advancing lines
Sent forth a herald, if perchance the war
Might end all bloodless, and the antagonists
Strike hands on just and equitable terms.
This was his overture:—That with the bounds
Of ancient times fixed to their territories
Each people should content them, and refrain
From acts of injury and violence
Done to the other; and whate'er had been
By rapine taken should restore—preferring
Peace to grim war, things certain to unknown
And doubtful issues. But the arrogant foe,
Proudly reliant on his great array,
Reviled the herald fiercely, and to threats
Bitter and harsh added calumnious lies.
He sought but to recover—such the strain—

Unblamably, by patriotic war,
The ancient fields whence Israel of old,
On his departure from the banks of Nile,
Had driven forth the rightful Ammonite lord
By armed aggression. And if Israel still
Were resolute to hold those lands, and chose
Rather to fight in maintenance of wrong
Than to restore what violence had seized,
The avenging gods would strike to vindicate
The righteous claims of Ammon. But if now
'Twere Israel's better will, by justice ruled,
All to relinquish that by wrong was won,
And freely to retire from those wide lands
Which Arnon and the Jabbok waters bound—
Eastward extending to the desert lone,
And west to Jordan's gently gliding stream—
Then Ammon readily would make a league
On equitable terms, and sacredly,
Once made, observe it, to their mutual gain.

All this the herald to our chief rehearsed,
And with this answer forthwith sped his way:—
That neither Jephthah nor his forefathers
By force or guile had done the Ammonite wrong.
The lands laid claim to never were within
The realm of Ammon; for three hundred years
Israel had held them; nor in all that time
In jest or earnest had one word been said
To challenge or to call their right in doubt.
Haply it is thy thought that what thy god

Chemosh hath held is thine to have and hold,
But that the lands our God has long possessed
He will abandon, and will leave its lords
Outcast, dispersed, and disinherited.
Will he forsake the soil that worships him!
Nay! as of old, invincible in war,
He stript our enemies of their wide domains,
To-day the same just Arbiter will give
Like happy issue to this battlefield.

The herald told his tale. Loud, swift and loud,
Was the reply: from brazen lips it came,
And struck the startled air. Loud o'er the field
The onset sounded; and at once uprose
A din confused and deafening. Shouts of men
And clash of arms were mingled with the noise
Of snorting steeds and rattling chariots.
The concave vault of heaven echoed loud
The resonant discord, while the trembling earth
Groaned on its axis, and the hills rolled back
In volume deep the repercussive roar.
'Then was the fierce and deadly struggle; then
Each warrior his bravery and skill
Put forth as if the issue of the day
Hung on his single sword. The combatants
Fight with mixed fortune; strike, are stricken; chase
And flee by turns. With blood the rippling streams
Are deep empurpled. Over all the field
A cloud of dust, dense as the cloud of night,
Brought darkness o'er the sky; but respite none

Brought to the maddening conflict. Fiercely raged
The Ammonite, reliant on the strength
Of his proud muster. Confidence in God
And in our juster cause inspired our ranks
With equal resolution,—While the line
On neither side gave way, but each maintained
Its ground with stubborn valour, lo, amid
The gloom of dust enveloping the field,
Amid the cries and groans of wounded men,
And the keen shouts of captains urging on
To uttermost achievement, the dense cloud
That overhung the writhing combatants
Rolled off, and day shone down upon the plain
Undimmed in splendour. Then it was there burst
A crash of pealing thunder from the sky,
Whose deep imperious voice, reverberating
Loud and prolonged, arrested on the spot
The furious conflict. Awe and dread dismayed
The boldest-hearted; the uplifted hand
Drooped nerveless in amazement; while the limbs
Of mould most warlike by a chilling cold
Lost spring and tension, thewless and benumbed.
'Twas then our leader, with a mighty voice
And look aflame with ardour, cried aloud
As with a battle-shout: Thee, Father of all—
Thee will we follow where thou leadst, and where
Thy flaming brand waves us to follow thee.
'Tis God, 'tis God, who with these swift-spced bolts
Strikes down the foemen's ranks; and all the sky

Blazes with fiery squadrons. Israel, strike
For God and for your homes!—Far o'er the plain
The words were heard, clear as a battle-shout,
Both armies traversing. Ah, then the sword
Of Israel descended, raining blows
Deadly and swift, as if each gleaming brand
Were grasped by hand unwearied. Panic-struck,
From the lost field the Ammonite wildly rushed,
And Israel with redoubled strength pursued;
Nor ended either the pursuit or flight
Till Night, descending on her sable clouds,
In shadows deep enwrapt the field of blood,
And to the warriors weary with pursuit
Brought welcome rest, and to the fugitives
Concealment yet more welcome.

CHO.

Wherefore then

Brings not the conqueror his forces home?

MES. Stay; the grim tale of war is not yet told
To the full end.

CHO.

Haply his scattered ranks
The foe is rallying, or with musters new
Presents a threatening front.

MES.

So might it be
If men stark dead may hear the muster-call,
And rally round their chief. And dead they are;
For God assembled the whole warlike strength
Of that perfidious race, to reap it down
In one lost battle. Thus, crushed utterly,
They either cumber now with ghastly heaps

The field they fought on, or wide o'er the plain
And scattered far their livid corpses lie,
And feed the vultures. And no war shall thence
In many years arise. With wise forethought
Our captain has engaged futurity,
And hath to late posterity ensured
A quiet, restful time. O'er the whole realm
Of Ammon swiftly his victorious arms
He carried; twenty towns he overthrew;
Low as the ground he laid their battlements;
Red flames emwrapt their roofs; the weary sword
Slew all of manhood's years. The fields were made
A barren waste; and none but tender boys,
Unwarlike women, and men worn with age,
Are left to roam the devastated soil,
And mourn their country's ruin and their own.

CHORUS

Bringer of the golden light,
Sun, that in thy swift-winged flight,
Returning o'er thy shining way,
Rulest the change of night and day,
And by thy ever-wandering flame
Givest to the year a name,
Measuring to this globe terrene
The times and ages that have been:
At last, after thy circuiting
Twenty times its annual ring

Hath closed, O Sun, again thy beam
Gladly adown doth stream
Upon the race of Israel FREE,
Restored to long-lost Liberty!

The ill-starred inroad on our land
Made by the Ammonite's proud band
The might of Jephthah hath repelled;
And Ammon's insolence is quelled,
The spoiler spoiled. Ah, nought availed
The feathered shafts his bowmen hailed,
Nor rushing charge by chariots made,
Redoubtable with curving blade.
The squadroned horsemen could not save,
Nor phalanx deep of soldiers brave,
The host which Heaven had doomed to yield
Upon that fatal battlefield.

Now learn at last, ye faithless! own
At last that not of wood or stone
Is fashioned the Eternal God;
Nor is the Deity's abode
In circumscribed metallic heaven
By sculptor's skilful fingers graven;
Nor yet in mass of clay inert
Made under moulder's hand expert
The human form to counterfeit.
Our God hath his celestial seat

Above the radiant orbs that roam
By day and night the azure dome.
In majesty Omnipotent,
The author and the life is he
Of all created things that be;
And never man the eye hath bent
Upon his viewless form; nor may
The hand of mortal e'er portray
An image of the Invisible.
Who can resist his sovereign will?
He curbs the foolish pride of kings,
And, just in all his ways, he brings
Far other than the event desired
To godless aims and hopes inspired
By bad ambition. Yea, and he,
When sorrow burdens heavily
The blameless bosom, undelayed
Sends down his comfort-bringing aid.
He lifts the poor man from the dust,
And him whose humble place of trust
Is but to tend the flock doth raise
Until with skilful hand he sways
The golden sceptre, and around
His brows the diadem is bound,
Sparkling with many a lustrous gem—
The king-encircling diadem.

Him, as sole Deity and King,
Let all this wondrous art-wrought thing,

The earth, beneath whatever sky
The homes and haunts of men do lie,
Acknowledge, reverence, and love—
Both where the Sun, mounting above
The eastern rim, with slanting beam
Strikes down on woodland, strath and stream.
And where, beneath his noontide way,
Burns his too near and fiercer ray.
And let this high ascription have
The voice of all who lip the wave
Where Tagus' noble flood is rolled
Over his sands of yellow gold;
And those who dwell in regions drear,
Storm-swept and wintry all the year,
Where snows perpetual enfold
The earth's wan bosom icy-cold.

Ho, Hebrew maidens! each fair neck
Let the entwining gold bedeck;
And let your darkly flowing hair
Breathe out odours sweet and rare.
Ho, Hebrew maids! your temples bind
With the sparkling gems of Ind;
And, lightly tripping strew around
With flowers of many hues the ground.
Speed ye! why linger all too long
The cymbal's silvery tinkling ring,
And harp and lyre with trembling string,
To sound a new triumphal song

To our victorious Lord on high?
Why hear we not the minstrelsy
Of modulated pipe? and, lo,
Is there not one with nimble toe
To strike the ground in measured beat?
Not one to own that it is meet
To banish on this festal day
Gloom from every breast away,
And in the dance's wheeling maze
Forget the ills of careworn days?

Let the fairest of the flock
A victim on the altar smoke,
While odours sweet in clouds aspire
From the festive altar-fire.
And thou, child of our leader bold,
Hope of a name henceforth enrolled
With heroes—in thy bright array
Deck thee, maiden, and away!
Thy sire returned from war's alarms
Embrace with joy in loving arms.
Go, Iphis, quickly robe thee now
In lustrous folds, and from thy brow
Restrain the wandering twisted tress,
And bid him in thy beauteousness
Abounding welcome.—Hark! the hum
Of martial voices! and they come
Near and yet nearer! Maiden, see!
It is thy father home to thee!

JEPHTHAH

Monarch of all the world, my voice to thee
I lift in adoration—lift to thee,
For thou alone art God, and thou alone
Bendest to kneeling worshipper an ear
Attentive to his prayer. Omnipotent!
What mortal tongue may speak thee as thou art,
Or frame fit words to name thy character?
A stern avenger art thou, yet thy heart
Melts with a father's pity; to thy foes
A God of terror and severity.
But to all those that love thee thou art good
And gentle, and when evil days befall
Thou art their refuge and deliverer.
Thy wrath is dreadful; yet it doth not burn
Implacable for ever; while thy love
Is boundless, warmer than all love that glows
In human bosom: yet 'tis love that burns
Mixt oft with burning anger, justly incensed
By rebel deeds, and provocation long.

So have we seen. We have endured the woes
Of subjugation to our enemies;
And, impious, by the impious have been scourged
And pierced with many sorrows. All is just—
Most just the punishment which we have borne,
We, who forsook thee, King, Protector, God,
Maker of all things, of perennial good

The ever-flowing fountain—and invoked
In foolish supplication speechless stones,
And to deaf wood made vainly anxious vows.

With shame I speak the words—with reddening
shame:—

Man, with discursive reason furnished—man,
In whom resides the imperishable spark
Of heaven-enkindled intellect, adores
Irrational and mindless forest stocks;
With living hands burns incense to things dead;
And low bows down in superstitious awe
To worship his own handwork. Therefore we,
Forsaking, were forsaken, and have borne
The righteous penalty of our misdeeds,
Crushed and subdued by long-succeeding ills,
Raid after raid, in devastating force,
The bands of Edom and Philistia,
And the fierce Ammonite, and Syria's hordes
Have with contaminating foot o'errun
The sacred soil assigned to be the lot
And heritage of thy people. But at last,
Taught by calamity and driven by scorn—
The scorn of taunting foes—we have returned,
So late returned, to thee; so late—but still
Thou art a God benign and merciful,
And thy just rage thou reimest in; thy wrath
Ebbs from thy pitying bosom; guilty deeds
Which thou perforce must hate thou yet dost cease
To call to thy remembrance; and thy children,

Renounced for their deep crimes and held as sons
Forth banished from thy favour, yet again,
Relenting, in thy mercy infinite
Thou to thy love restorest. And yet more,
As if it were a little thing to grant
To treason and revolt of darkest hue—
For such our crime—thy pardon, thou dost heap
New triumphs on us, victory and renown.

Stript of his warlike panoply and pomp,
The foe, dispirited, has turned and fled,
With bow unstrung. His chariots of war
Stumble, impeded in their headlong flight,
O'er the unnumbered dead that strew the plain.
The boaster who so proudly thought to bind
Jerusalem in chains lies stark and cold,
A banquet to the vultures. Ghastly Death
Covers the fields with carnage, and the brooks
Are running red and swollen with the blood
Of Israel's foes and thine. Eternal King!
Creator of the world and Judge Supreme!
We therefore with a glad and grateful mind
Our deep-felt thanks repay; for deeply felt
And all unfeigned our gratitude, bound up
In the remembrance of thy glorious acts.
O'er bleeding victims we will make to thee
Our suppliant prayers, and on thine altar burn
Full many a sacrifice. And while the flames
Leap round the victim, and the curling smoke
Mounts high above us, we will sing to thee,

Adoring thee as God alone, our God,
And Father of our fathers, whom thou ledst
Safe through the Red Sea's foaming waves, when thou
Didst give command and the vast heaving deep
Sank into placid rest, and raged no more;
And the soft fluid brine, by strange constraint,
Parted and stood congealed. On either side
The glassy deep hung like a sparkling wall
Of massive crystal, to thy voice of power
Obedient, who didst charge it to prepare
A pathway for thy people.—O most High!
Remembering thy covenant of old—
Gentle and gracious as thou ever art—
Deign to accept my vow. Though poor the gift,
'Tis from a grateful heart, and due to thee
According to the vow which late I made
On eve of battle. Home victorious
I now return, and whatsoever first
Shall come to meet me from my threshold forth
To thee shall be devoted, and its blood
Shall stain thine altar, a burnt-offering:
Although no victim man may immolate
Can counterweigh thy gifts. But thou interpretest
Kindly and generously the offerings
Laid on thine altar by a grateful heart;
And as thou ever faithfully dost keep
Thy promises, so art thou pleased when we
Do faithfully to thee perform our vows.
And thou dost deal with men as are their deeds—

Stern to revolvers, making them to feel
The curbing and the stroke of thy strong hand;
But ever gentle, ever merciful
To all who meekly venerate thy name:
Nor is there other Power whom heaven and earth
And the dark shadowy realm of death obey.

IPHIS, JEPHTHAH, SYMMACHUS, CHORUS

IPH. The hour that I have waited for is come,
And I go forth to snatch the joy it brings,
And look upon my father's face again.—

O next to God to be revered by me!
Suffer me now to feel my father's arms
Enfold me to his bosom.—No? alas,
Why gazest thou on me with eyes so fixed,
And stern as if in anger?

JEPH. Woe to me!

IPH. Now God avert upon our foes the ill
Thy words do darkly bode.

JEPH. Would it might be!
But they strike home.

IPH. Thy speech is full of fear,
But void to me of meaning. What is it
Thy words so darkly veil?

JEPH. My darling child,
Born to such misery! Woe, woe to me!

IPH. Alas, I weep to hear thee; weep and tremble.
Fares the army well?

JEPH. Right well.

IPH. And thou hast conquered?

JEPH. Yea.

IPH. And no cruel wound has sought thy life?

JEPH. I am unhurt.

IPH. Why heaves thy bosom then
With these deep moans and sighs thou fain wouldst
hide?

JEPH. There is no need for thee to know the cause
Just yet; the time will come.

IPH. Alas, my father;
I know not how I have offended thee—
To my deep sorrow.

JEPH. Thou hast not offended:
Thy father has—to thy deep hurt, poor girl!

IPH. I know no wrong thou canst have done to me;
But say I had been wronged by some mischance,
It ought not to distress thee thus; for wrongs
By parents done must not be murmured at,
But borne submissively.

JEPH. Thy words, my child,
Are wise and well become thee; but the more
Thou minglest wisdom with thy artless words
The deeper is the wound thou openest
In my sad breast.

IPH. O, whatsoe'er it be,
My father, that perturbs thy mind, avoid
The present thought of it. Thy countrymen

With one consent are now rejoicing
For blessings won by thee: mar not their joy
By thy dejectedness, and let thy friends
Be glad in thy glad presence.

JEPH. Presence brief
Bringing long absence between me and thee.

IPH. Haply war's perils call thee hence again?

JEPH. No crisis war could bring so grave and dread
As meets me now at home.

IPH. Can there be there—
At home—a graver peril than in war?

JEPH. In war I found deliverance; at home
I am undone, and all is lost to me.

IPH. O say not so; thy country and thy hearth
Are saved, and owe their welfare to thy sword.

JEPH. Be it; my thanks to bounteous Heaven are
due
For that good ending.

IPH. Ever for like cause
May thanks be due by thee.

JEPH. And yet I fear
The safety wrought will not endure for long.

IPH. O, then, while yet it lasts, and our affairs
Stand prosperously, it is meet we bow
The suppliant knee to Heaven, and perform
The vows which we have vowed. For 'tis unmeet
When the wild blast begins again to blow
And discompose our bosoms, *then* to urge
The Deity with prayers—in days serene

Unworshipped, unremembered, and passed by.
And he who in his clear and sunny days,
When all is well, has striven to be approved
Of God—he, when the adverse storm assails,
Is buttressed by his sense of rectitude,
And unpresumptuous but confident
Kneels known to seek the aid vouchsafed of Heaven,
The aid already in Heaven's self-moved grace
Descending to his side. Serene in heart
He utters forth the vows devotion claims,
And firm in hope forecasts the coming years.

JEPH. Thou bidst me think of that whereon my
thoughts

Already brood, and which must be performed.

IPH. And what restrains thy hand?

JEPH. My daughter, leave

The ordering to my care; and what befits
A maiden's mind and years, that care be thine.

IPH. But nought can be of unconcern to me
That touches thee, my father.

JEPH. Ah, 'tis so!

But meanwhile let it be thy care at home
That all things there are seemly: so shalt thou
Do as thy father wills thee. Afterward
Return thou hither in a little while;
There is a sacrifice that calls thee soon.

IPH. It shall be so; I go and soon return.—
O my sad heart, what is it has so changed
My father's wonted feeling toward me?

Till now no man than he was tenderer,
 Nor ever child by parent held more dear.
 And now he is so sullen, stern, and grim,
 And bears an aspect dark and menacing,
 As if he still were smiting down his foes
 In the mid tumult of the battle strife.
 There is deep cause for this, whate'er it be;
 And though I know it not, I dread it greatly.
 He grieves for me—to my bewilderment;
 For in my heart I find no fault to move
 A parent's anger. 'Tis the cruel lot
 Which woman still is born to. Though she be
 Stainless as heaven's azure, Calumny
 With venom'd fang rends her pure innocence.
 The fiction of a prating menial
 Wreaking a spite; the baseless fancy bred
 In the wild freaks of wedded jealousy;
 The whisper of a beldam neighbour, breathed
 In utter malice; all is held for truth
 If levelled at a woman's name and fame.
 What ill my father may surmise of me
 I cannot grasp. There is no anodyne,
 To make my grief endurable, like this—
 Which still is mine—a heart that hath no stain.

SYR. Well hast thou said; and well thy words e
 press

The daughter of a hero, and the child
 Of a chaste matron, and the unconquered soul
 Of Hebrew maiden worthy of her race.

Malignity may fabricate a crime;
But God the Judge looks on the secret thoughts,
And vindicates the guiltless, whosoe'er
May slander and revile. The full rewards
Of life lived out and ended are from him;
And thitherward our hope and striving tend,
Not wavering and vain—the Heavens are just.
But wrongs a father, cruel or kind, may do,
His children must submissively endure.
Wherefore, obedient to thy father's will,
Revisit now thy home. Should ought emerge
From the dark fringe of this obscurity,
Here like a fowler will I watch for it,
Close on thy father's heels; and all I learn
Shall quickly follow thee.

CHO.

Truly, herein

Thou tak'st a friendly course, good Symmachus.

SYM. I pledge my zeal.

CHO.

O do thy uttermost

To free the trembling girl from this alarm.

It is a claim old friendship makes of thee;

For thou of old hast been her father's friend,

And never interrupted in its course

Of perfect faith thy friendship yet hath been

Since first thy cradled infancy awoke

To conscious being. And thy country claims

This service of thee; for thy country owes

To Jephthah her deliverance.

SYM.

Say no more:

Entrust this task to my fidelity.

CHO. Do it with all thy art; and the dark folds
Of Jephthah's mind shake out and bring to view.

SYM. Fear not; from me he neither can nor will
Conceal the trouble of his soul. I know
The time and way to sound his very heart.

CHORUS

Wish happiest augury
 speed on thy quest!
And He who sees ev'ry re-
 cess of the breast—
Who reads the heart's innermost
 thoughts where they lurk;
And nought from his view is lost
 man e'er can work—
The heart and the life who tries,
 thoughts and deeds done—
Prosper the enterprise
 thou hast begun!

But, Malice, thou evil thing,
 who shall assign
The doom which thy deeds shall bring
 on thee condign?
The falsehoods thou weavest,
 the crimes thou dost feign,
The friendships thou cleavest
 asunder again:

The strife which thou makest
by wickedest arts;
The bonds which thou breakest
between wedded hearts:
The fathers thou turnest
from fondness to ire,
Whose bosoms thou burnest
with spite-kindled fire,
When thy venom has wrung them
with torturing pain,
And to frenzy has stung them
and maddened the brain:—

O Malice, thou evil thing,
these are thy crimes—
What doom on thee shall they bring
in the last times?
In the deepest abyss
of the caverns below,
There have thou thy place
with the prisoners of woe:
There let darkness for ever
encompass thee round,
And trace of thee never
on earth more be found!

When He, the high witness
and judge of hid things,
In challengeless fitness
this doom on thee brings,

O how many woes
 that now weary the heart
And banish repose
 shall down with thee depart!
And how many a breast
 now distracted with pain
Shall return to its rest
 and be happy again!

SYMMACHUS, JEPHTHAH

SYM. Leader renowned in arms, what sudden cause
Hath robbed thy countenance of its wonted mien?
What grief is this that mars our festal joys,
Sad-eyed and troubled? Fear has fled our land;
Our treacherous foemen have endured the stroke
Of righteous vengeance, and our country breathes
Once more the air of sweet tranquillity.
Shouldst not thou, therefore, while the State outpours
Its gratulations on thy victory,
And while thy grateful country lauds thy name,
Lifting it to the stars, a general hum
Of songs triumphal filling all the land:—
Shouldest not thou, who of this public joy
Art source and author, share thine own effect,
And, in the general joy participant,
Rejoice and be glad?

JEPH. O pleasant lot
That's lowliest, and in its lowly depths

Finds deep tranquillity and stormless calm!
Benign the star that shone upon his birth
Who spends his days far from tumultuous scenes,
Unnamed, unknown, his best security
The silence that surrounds him and conceals.

SYM. Nay; richly dowered with real happiness
Him rather would I deem, whose manly worth,
By manly deeds approved, hath gained for him
Eternal honour; whose achievements high
Have dragged him from obscurity, around
Haloing his name with glory till it shines
Resplendent to all eyes, and marks him one
Distinguished from the ignoble multitude
Who love their ease and shrink from glorious toils.
O happy he, whose justly won renown
To future ages shall endear his name,
And in the hearts of living men embalm
His memory for ever, as a man
To be remembered, while the inglorious dead
In myriads sleep forgotten. But a man
To slumberous indolence and sloth enthralled—
Who spends an aimless and a sluggish life,
Like the dull herds that browse the sunny fields—
It matters not, I ween, whether he die,
Or lead a life obscurer than the grave:
On both alike there rests a silence deep,
Alike upon his life and on his tomb.—

Wherefore since Heaven has heaped thy favoured lot
With all that bounteous Heaven can give to man—

With praise and honour, wealth and high renown,
And victory in battle—recognize
With thankful heart God's great benignity:
And sully not by sordid utterances
The lustre of thy name. For there is nought,
Nor aught can be, more pleasing unto God
Than is a heart that gratefully receives
His gifts, remembering ever whence they be.

JEPH. Wealth, honour, victory, and laurelled fame,
Triumph and glory won on fields of war—
These are high-sounding words that charm the ear
And steal men's admiration. But regard
With closer scrutiny the things that seem
So sweet and pleasant at first view, too soon
Shalt thou discover that they cheat the eye;
And if thou taste the things that seem so sweet,
Straight shalt thou find in them an aftertaste
That smarts with the fierce bitterness of gall.
Never on living man has Fortune shone
So fair and radiant that she weighs not down
Her favours with disavouring counterpoise
In the opposing scale. What lot but hath
Embittering admixture. Evermore
Bitter and sweet, and sweet with bitter things,
Are in our cup commingled. Thou dost deem
Me happy, measuring my happiness
By unsubstantial glitter and the applause
Now general and loud, soon silent—*Me*
Whom miseries most real overwhelm!

SYM. O say not so; rather conceive it thus—
That Fortune, friendly to thy utmost wish,
Offers thee all her best. What yet is left
For thee to crave or win? But yesterday
Scorned, banished, driven from thy father's house,
And thrust away into the wild lone land,
A lowly cabin all that called thee lord;
To-day, as with the swiftness of a dream,
Enriched magnificently, as dreamers are.
What wouldst thou? Yet, misprising the large dower,
Thou murmurest, thou murmurest passionately—
So heavy is the load of place and power.
Ah, if that burden bear thee down, thou art
Poor-spirited and lackest that which makes
The soul of heroes, magnanimity.
Is Heaven's munificence a grief to thee?
Well then for thee were thy relinquished lot
And pristine cabin roof! To sovereign power
Men rush through fire and sword, eager to seize
The glittering fascination; sovereignty,
Unsought, unthought of, drops into thy hand,
And thou hast but to grasp it and 'tis thine.
Most men that win buy victory with blood
Bled from their veins—with slaughter of their friends
Ranked on the deadly field—with detriment,
Not soon repaired, to the whole commonweal.
But *thou*—thou bringest bloodless laurels home;
Thy mustered ranks are full, thyself unscathed,
And thou with general acclaim art hailed

The Saviour of thy country, and the dread
Of all thy country's foes. Nay, view thyself:
Raised from thy poor estate to opulence,
From servitude to freedom; yesterday
Lost in the ignoble throng, to-day renowned
And thy proud deeds with glowing praise extolled
To the high empyrean; now, no more
Merged in the nameless multitude, thou art
Our chosen chieftain, foremost of the land
And nobler than the noblest. Is there aught
Yet lacking to round off thy happiness
To the last limit of enrichment? Nought
Save only this, the power to use aright
God's bounteous gifts, capacity to match
The volume of thy great prosperity.

JEPH. Friend, I perceive thou thinkest as the crowd,
Swayed by a strong delusion. Couldst thou see
With the mind's eye as clearly as thy glance
Can pierce the stream that o'er its pebbled bed
Flows limpid as the sunbeam—couldst thou thus
Discern how greatness to great ills is placed
In perilous apposition, thou wouldst grant
I speak not at a venture when I call
My state, which thou so greatly dost extol,
Most miserable.

SYM. Thus it ever is.
Our own inconstancy and discontent,
Bred of a mind that cannot be at rest,
Unfit us to bear either destiny

With just appreciation. Rich men laud
The air of sweet tranquillity that reigns
Around the poor man's lot; the silence deep
Which no loud trumpet-call to arms invades;
The slumbers that are free from wakefulness;
The wakeful hours embittered by no care.
The poor man lavishes his praise on gold—
Gold, purple, menials, vassals, equipage,
Stately magnificence, and lordly halls—
And deems the rich are blest alone of men.
But weigh in a just balance either lot;
From troubling ills neither is wholly free.
The child of poverty is pinched by want;
The opulent are haunted still by fear.
Wealth brings full many pleasures; poverty
Brings with it its own sheltering defence,
And in its lowly vale it sleeps secure.
In every lot sorrow and gladness meet,
And doubtless that is to be deemed the best
Where joys are multiplied and griefs are few—
Such lot as bounteous Heaven hath made thine own,
Wherein are gathered in one shining heap
Honour and wealth, renown and victory;
Even such the glorious guerdon thou hast won.
To spurn it from thee is to play the fool;
To recognize it not is mere revolt;
While inability to bear its weight
With seemly moderation—that, methinks,
Would make a question of thy manliness.

JEPH. In vain with common pharmacy thou triest
To medicine my wound. There is no balm
For this deep hurt, no healing. My disease
Preys on my inmost vitals, and its seat
Lies deep beyond thy reach. Must I not grieve?
Yea, and my sorrow is the bitterer
That blame in me intensifies my loss;
And misery following beyond all thought
Of mine, hath made mine error huge indeed.

SYM. Thou call'st me friend, nor ever hitherto
 Hast found reproach in my fidelity:
 Is there a cause that bids thee not disclose
 Thy sorrow to my friendly sympathy,
 Nor trust thy woeful secret to mine ear?

JEPH. Hast thou remembrance of a vow I made?

Sym. That was to bind thee if the army sped
And home returned in safety?

JEPH. Thou hast named
The secret of my sorrow. Would I had been
More wary and forethoughtful ere I bound
A vow upon my soul.

Sym. It passes me
To frame the inadvertence in my thoughts.

JEPH. Yet brings it ruin on my house and me.

SYM. A victim slain bring ruin upon all!
How can it be?

JEPH. Alas, my child was left
Sole hope of all her race in coming years.

Sym. Her wilt thou slay! What dread necessity

Compels the deed?

JEPH. She first on our return
Came forth to meet us.

SYM. And came well. What crime
Lay in so doing?

JEPH. I have vowed; my vow
Demands of me unswerving faithfulness.

SYM. Ah, this is then the pinch that wrings so
hard!

JEPH. 'Tis so; a rankling barb fixed in my breast—
And never from the wound can it be torn
Till—stained with a revolting sacrifice,
Deep as the victim's crimson blood can stain—
Ruined and miserable, I in ruin crush
My miserable dear ones, and so pay
The debt due to just Heaven for them and me.
But, O thou King Omnipotent, who sitt'st
Above the thundercloud, and from thy hand
Hurlest the flashing lightning—before whom
Heaven and earth and the dark realm below
Tremble in awed subjection—O, if e'er,
Proudly obeying thy supreme behests,
By word or deed I have accomplished aught
That pleased thee—on thy kneeling suppliant
Look down in mercy, and my prayer hear!
No more I ask of thee proud victories,
And plaudits of the people wild with joy.
Bring back the storm of battle; bring the spears
Of vengeful Ammon dense and menacing,

And let them bear me down in the thick fight,
Down to the ensanguined dust, and there dispatch
This noxious life pierced with a thousand wounds.

CHO. O what a fall is here! Since time began
No bliss endures unbroken unto man:

The joys of earth are never undecayed;
Fair as they bloom, they only bloom to fade.

JEPH. Or let thine irresistible right hand,
Cleaving the sky with thy far-reaching bolt,
On me, accursed and godless parricide,
Discharge thy levin, in a whirlwind sped
Of swift, tumultuous fire. I am even now
A hurtful creature, and a life prolonged
Would make me yet more noxious day by day.
Down therefore hurl me, even as I breathe,
Into the nether darkness deep, where I,
Engulfed and swallowed up in darkest gloom,
Shall nevermore work harm to living thing.

SYM. So grave a matter must not be dispatched
With rash and sudden haste. Within thy breast
A hidden tumult rages, and thou art
Perturbed well-nigh to frenzy. Calm thyself:
When this deep agitation sinks to rest,
And thou art free to ponder wholesome rede—
Then, after well-weighed council with thy friends,
Thou shalt determine all even as thou wilt,
Ruled by thy calmer judgment.

JEPH. To consult
Is helpful at a doubtful pass; but he

Who seeks for counsel where no help can come
And remedy is none, toils all in vain
And adds but foolishness to misery.

SYM. But remedies avail when timely used.

JEPH. True; if the malady do not transcend
The healer's art.

SYM. If haply at first view
Great difficulties oppose, there is no cause
At once and altogether to despair.
Rather, 'tis wise and thoughtful counselling
Thou needest all the more. Oft it befalls
That the perplexed and tangled ravelment
Which baffles one man to another yields.
And if thou act on counsel, pondered well
And yet unwise, and the effect be good,
The praise is thine that waits upon success;
While, if the event be evil, none can blame
Uncounselled rashness as the evil cause.
To act unwisely under high advice
Is near akin to wisdom. But if no
Resource be found—if round on every side
Some power invincible obstruct thy path,
Or fate beyond contending—where advice
Is baffled, and can give no guiding word—
Then, be the issue what it may, reproach
Will fall from none whose counsel thou hast sought.
Whereas if, silently, thou wilt achieve
Thy fell intent, a horror new to men,
The friend who, in thy counsel, would have been

As thou art and have deemed thy course the best,
Will be the first to argue from the event,
And make the issue blame thee—will aver
There had been found a timely remedy
Had timely conference not been withheld.

CHO. Scorn not right warning; deeds too rashly done
Bring, in remembrance, deep remorse and long.

CHORUS

Though sad the tidings I shall bring,
A sad and all-unwelcome thing;
And though it send a wilder throe
Through hearts already wrung with woe—
Alike to matron and to maid,
To poignant misery betrayed,
I am resolved all to disclose,
Rehearsing matters as they rose.
Perchance reflexion due or prayer
May yet their mournful lot repair.

Meanwhile these falling tears I weep
O'er the calamities that sweep
The joys of human life away.
What descant shall I first essay
Of lamentation? Shall I sound
The misery of Jephthah, bound
So fast in errors reasonless
As to believe him brought to this,

That he, his piety to save,
Must lay his child in fiery grave.

Or shall I rather weep for thee,
O maiden born to misery?
For thee I weep this dropping brine;
What lot so pitiable as thine,
Who in thy tender blossoming
Must perish, winter-nipt in spring
Hope bade thee rarest things await,
And brought thee to the golden gate,
The entrance to all earthly bliss;
And Hope hath promised all amiss.
Full low thy fairest hopes are laid,
Down-trodden in no sudden raid
Of foes marauding o'er the land
And leading thee 'mid captive band
Of weeping maidens far away:
Nor is it Heaven hath sent decay
To wither thy unfolding bloom
And lay thee early in the tomb:
Thy father's hand shall strike the blow
That brings thee and thy beauty low.
A sacrifice thou shalt be slain,
And from thy rudely severed vein
The reeking blood shall gush and fall
As from a slaughtered animal;
And the red stream shall stain the ground
And crimson all the altar round.

The knife thy tender limbs shall shear,
Which fellest foemen would defend,
And wildest bear the forests rear,
Famished and fierce, would spare to rend.
O maiden born to misery,
Deadly the weird thou art to dree!
Never thy conquering father's blow
Wouldst thou have met from conquering foe.

Rejoice, ye dead that strew the plain
By the sword of Jephthah slain!
If aught of life and feeling still
Lurk in your bosoms stark and chill,
Rejoice! not unavenged ye lie.
Behold the dreadful penalty
The victor from himself exacts!
For so the Power Supreme enacts
That change shall ever follow change
Swiftly through life's allotted range;
And 'tis immutably decreed
That sorrows shall to joys succeed
As surely as the dark-winged Night
Follows the setting orb of light,
Or Winter cold and blustering
Follows the balmy days of Spring.
There is no joy on earth so pure
Its sweetness will unchanged endure.
The cup we raise with lips so fain
Smarts with loathed gall ere we can drain.

Full many a wile and treachery,
Unrecked of, all around us lie;
And many a sharp and cruel turn
Between the cradle and the urn
Embittereth the life of man,
And marks with woe its chequered span.

So, when the waves are sunk to rest
And slumber still on Ocean's breast,
And all the expanse of waters vast
Lies calm and hushed, and on the mast
The idle sail hangs motionless,
And woos in vain the zephyr's kiss,
And in the sky if cloud there be,
Its shadow sleeps on the sleeping sea:
Even then the whirling tempest, nursed
In cloud and darkness, forth will burst,
And furiously upheave the sea
In waves far-rolled and billowy.
Again the wild impetuous dash
Of rushing waters, and the crash
And roar of the loud storm, as past
It whirls in many a wrathful blast.
The sail is rent, the staggering keel
All doubtfully its way doth feel
Through the convulsed and foaming brine.—
Even such a state, O man, is thine.

A little calm, and then the wrath

Of storms sweeps o'er thy troubled path.
And truly little calm have we
Who sail on this untr tranquil sea.
If, amid slaughterings and alarms,
Attacks, tumultuous calls to arms,
And dread of death as ever near—
More dreadful than the death we fear—
A gleam of joy shine on our hearts,
'Tis but a gleam and soon departs,
Transient as the flickering blaze
That sparks amid the stubble raise;
It comes, is seen, and it is gone,
Away on the swift breezes flown;
And then, linked in succession long,
Trooping, our lasting sorrows throng.

JEPHTHAH, PRIEST

JEPH. O holy orb, source of diurnal light!
O fathers, happy in your love-lit homes!
O whosoe'er from deeds of crime are free!
From this abhorred and execrable rite
Turn far away your eyes. Or, kindly Earth,
Soon to drink in a guiltless maiden's blood,
Cleave wide a rifted chasm beneath my feet,
And in thy deepest caverns swallow me,
While yet my hands are bloodless. Would I were
Even now engulfed for ever in thy gloom!
Nay, I recoil not from the abyss of woe,

If only I may there abide unnamed
A parricide, the slayer of my child.
But why speak of Gehenna and its woes?
To me my home burns with Gehenna's fire.
I see the grief-struck countenance of my wife
Interrogating me 'mid falling tears;
I see the look of utter agony
My child, so soon to die, shall turn on me;
I hear her weeping and lamenting voice,
As, tenderly enclasping me, she sobs
Her sorrows on my bosom. Woe to me!

Pr. This is grief raised to frenzy, ere the time—
Such grief as springs from the extremest ills,
When the raw wound rejects the healer's hand;
Or when the wild tempestuous deed is done,
Never to be undone or remedied.
But is it so with thee? The choice is thine
To be, or not be, miserable. No power
Compels the dreadful sacrifice; 'tis left
In thine own choosing: rather, sooth to say,
'Tis not so left; for who may rightly choose
To bear a load of self-willed misery?
No choice is thine to perpetrate a deed
Which Nature interdicts and Heaven abhors.
A deed revolting to a parent's heart.
Parental love—is there a stronger power
Implanted in our breast? Not man alone
Obeys the mighty impulse; everywhere
Its power is present. Whatsoever swims

The ocean depths, or with light-beating wing
Cleaves the caressing air, or issues forth
From the earth's teeming bosom—all are stirred
By an inborn and sacred influence.
For 'tis of God. Eternal Providence
This strong affection deeply hath infixed
In mortal bosoms, that the helpless young
Might be upbrought and nurtured with due care,
The general concord of the world endure,
And generations, constantly renewed,
Replenish the green earth. And deeper still
To engrave upon our minds the hallowed name,
It is his will to be, and to be called,
Our Father; sanctioning the primal bond
Of love parental likewise by all things,
Not by his sole example, but by all,
Even wildest things of earth and air and sea.
We who, deserve we but the human name,
Should have distinguishing humanity,
In actual tenderness are far surpassed
By forest beasts, and monsters of the deep
That gambol 'mid the ocean solitudes.
The blot of many a crime is on our hands;
Nor hold we there; too rashly we impute
To Heaven itself crimes every whit as great,
And hideous things beyond all utterance.
We feign the Eternal Deity to delight
In gory offerings: Egypt never held
Like error, in her ignorance of God;

Nor Asshur, beyond all the devotee
Of darkest superstition. Better far
That we, of birth unstained by blood, should keep
Our hands by blood unstained, and not forget
That in religion's rites we have been charged
To lay pure offerings on our altar-fires.
Think not our God by gory sacrifice
Propitiated, or by the blood of bulls.
They offer best who offer unto him
A heart polluted by no villainy,
A mind by simple truth informed and ruled,
A conscience that is sullied by no stain.

JERH. Why then are victims by our Law enjoined?

PR. Not that God takes delight in slaughtered rams,
Or sates his hunger with the smoking flesh
Of oxen slain; but he would have us do
What he commands, and trains us to obey.

JERU. But solemn vows are binding, are they not?

Pr. Not if the vows be wrong. The Law regards
Vows only that are lawful.

JERU. Wiser far,
I know it well, not to have promised aught
That might with our time-hallowed customs jar;
But, now the thing is done, a vow to God,
Once made, the law of God from heaven revealed
Commands us to fulfil,

Pr. What law commands
To immolate thy daughter?

Jeff. Even that

Which bids us pay the vows that we have vowed.

PR. To vow a thing which it is wrong to do,
Can that be right?

JEPH. Not to perform our vows
Is wrongdoing: there is no higher wrong.

PR. What, hadst thou vowed to burn the oracles
Delivered to the fathers?

JEPH. 'Tis an act
A maniac might contemplate, no sane man.

PR. And why? Because our sacred laws gainsay?

JEPH. No doubt.

PR. Then what of him who slays his
child?

JEPH. Not what is done is of so much concern
As why thou doest it. The motive shames
Or sanctifies the deed.

PR. Canst thou believe
Thy purpose reverences the will of Heaven?

JEPH. Abraham had Heaven's command to offer up
His only son.

PR. But he who bade forbade,
And stayed the uplifted stroke.

JEPH. Why bade he then?

PR. That Abraham's faith might shine o'er future
times,
A guide to souls in great perplexity.

JEPH. And why forbid?

PR. To show that, justly weighed,
Obedience is more than sacrifice.

JEPH. Meet 'tis that all obey the Power Supreme.

PR. Surely.

JEPH. And God enjoins us to make vows?

PR. 'Tis so.

JEPH. Requiring that our vows be paid?

PR. Doubtless.

JEPH. And chides he not with sharp re-
proof

The dilatory, and punishment severe
Exacts of false and faithless men whose vows
Are made but to be broken?

PR. In all this
Is nought that can avail thee to defend
Thy meditated crime. Whoe'er he be
That rashly vows to perpetrate a deed
Of horror nameless on the lips of men—
That man gives way to mocking dreams, and yields
To fancies that befool him. Be thy vow
Whate'er thy folly framed it, and confirmed
By all asseverations deep and dread,
Cease, madman, to associate Heaven above
With thine own wild atrocity; nor deem
That he who hates all wickedness, and lays
In his most holy law a curse upon
Unhallowed rites, can be propitiated
By that which he abhors. The voice divine
Sounds one clear note, one ever with itself,
And self-accordant—all is purest truth;
And a command once given from on high

Established stands and fixed for evermore—
For ever fixed, marking to men a path
Immutable, from which we may not turn
To right or left one handbreadth. It is meet
To keep this waymark ever in our view,
And take the guiding counsels of our life
From God's good law alone. For he hath set
That law as a far-gleaming torch to lead
Our erring and unsteadfast steps aright
In doubtful places, where misleading paths
Lurk, and diverge to darkness and to woe.

Since thou hast rashly swerved, and wandered far
From the just way which that pure light illumines—
Ere yet thine erring steps mislead thee more,
To the lost path return. If thou believe
A foolish vow like thine can be atoned
By a rite unutterably horrible,
Thou art deceived. That cruel deed will heap,
Still higher heap, the measure of thy guilt,
Not take thy guilt away. Be not beguiled
By mere illusive semblances of things.
'Tis true, God takes delight in sacrifice
Devoutly offered as his law ordains;
But vows like thine, revolting, he abhors:
Nor ever hath the man unpunished gone
Who, moved albeit by a pious zeal,
Hath laid upon God's altar fire profane.
Despise not then the warnings of a friend;

And, thinking to propitiate thy God,
Cease to provoke his wrath; for he will not
Be worshipped with thine own fantastic rites,
But in the way he has himself approved,
Himself appointed.

JEPH. Oft I have found, full oft,
That men who seem to be exceeding wise,
And vaunt their own superiority
To the unlettered crowd, have slender claim
To real wisdom; none more negligent
In their observance of the ancient rites,
Or holding in less reverent regard
Religion's mysteries. The multitude,
Rude and untaught, are steadfast to their vows,
And know no treachery—irrevocable
They hold the word they once have pledged to Heaven.
And thus, in my poor judgment, learning serves
No purpose now but over wrong-doing
To draw a veil, and wrap a fair disguise
Around dark deeds. But nobler far the aim
To be than but to seem; to *have* no fault,
Than wear the assumed attire of innocence,
And under cloak of guileful wariness
Conceal the villainies of a crafty mind.
Let none, then, who would have their children formed
To righteous ways, and held in good esteem,
Be too solicitous to store their minds
With learning of the schools. The better skilled
In that vain lore, the less of reverence

For all that men hold sacred.

Pr.

Yet once more,

Most upright, though in error! let my voice,
If leisure serve, its warning note resume,
And show thee, if I may, how ignorance,
Nurse of credulity, deludes and blinds
The mind it governs. He who vindicates
A deed of wrong by pleading in defence
A popular error, doth not, to my thought,
Sin aught the more excusably. Supreme
In heaven and earth, the Lord will not permit
To evil manners such despotic power
That a depraved and godless populace
May change by force of general consent
Right into wrong and evil into good.
For though the sycophants of kings may praise
The worse things till they wear the look and form
Of better things, and right names are reversed,
No adulation can so far prevail
That what the mindless many think to be,
Forthwith becomes, upright and honourable.
Can they impart to actions that are foul
The hue of moral beauty? That which makes
Ethical beauty is a quality
Fixed and determinate beyond the power
Of despot, or all potentates combined,
To alter or corrupt. But now, forsooth,
Scarce one of the rude rabble but assumes—
The more illiterate the more arrogant—

Authority to settle mooted points
Of darkest question ; and inflexibly,
As ignorance is wont, maintains the truth
Of the opinion he has once embraced.
Nor does he weigh withal, or care to weigh,
In a just balance whether the things he holds
So stubbornly be right or wrong ; and while
Blinder than all around he stumbles on,
Blindly he rates with blindness those who see.
As to the parched and fever-burning lip
Sweet things are sour ; and the delirious mind *
Deems its wild incoherencies the voice
Of sober wisdom, then most self-assured
When it raves wildest—even so, enwrapt
In the dark folds of intellectual night,
Ye would command where reason bids obey ;
And those whom it were fit ye took as guides
Ye urge, in faring forth, to follow *you*,
Till, rashly steering through the perilous brine,
They shatter on the rocks their stout-built keel.
'Tis true religion and true piety
To worship God, not by such ordinances
As thine own erring fantasy may frame ;
Nor yet by offering in sacrifice

* Alternatively thus, taking *sapere* and *desipere* in their primary sense, which, however, is not usual, and in the case of the latter is very rare:—

Sweet things are sour, yet the perverted taste
Is sure of its discernment ; surest then
When most in error—even so, enwrapt, etc.

Such victim as caprice may bid thee burn;
 But by such only as his high behests,
 From heaven delivered, in his law prescribe,
 And our ancestral customs ratify.

JEPH. Whate'er is done sincerely is to God
 Well pleasing, and he ever well approves
 The gifts that from a guileless heart proceed.
 'Tis not the gifted gold—the giver's mind
 Is that which Heaven regardeth.

PR.

In the main :

But if the obliquity of an evil mind
 Distort things that are straight, and view them wrong,
 The folly and purblindness of the man
 Can never rectify his crooked deeds,
 The right intention righting everything.
 Well meant, ill done, is common; but the phrase
 Carries no vindication—wrong is wrong.
 The things thou namest guileless, honest, right,
 By thee so deemed, are phantasies, are things
 Of wildest unreality—unless
 Something perchance there may be wilder still
 And more deluding than to close the eyes
 Against the light of truth. This hast thou done;
 And, fallen into blindness self-induced,
 Thou seekest honour even in thy crime,
 Adorning it with fair and sounding names.
 O, thou removest all landmarks of things
 By thus asserting that unjust or just,
 And fair or foul, are qualities that depend

On the opinion of the inconstant crowd!
But if so great a potency reside
In the collective wisdom of mere fools
That they can change at will unjust to just,
Give sacredness to rank profanity,
And interchange the right and wrong of things—
Why not believe they also have the power
Fire into flood to turn, and flood to fire;
And to the cold, still bosom of the dead
Restore the living breath? Why may they not
Arrest the flight of the swift-wheeling hours,
And bind the hands of ever-working change?
But if thou reckon such things far removed
Beyond the power of mortals, and controlled
By the Great Founder of the world alone,
Esteem the laws, which he has once ordained,
Ordained and fixed no less enduringly,
And placed for ever beyond mortal sway.
The final hour that o'er the world impends
Shall not annul his edicts. Heaven and earth,
And air and ocean, all shall be dissolved
In the last conflagration. But the Law,
Divinely given on the cloudy top
Of thunder-riven Sinai—mark it well—
No lapse of lengthening time shall take from it
The tip of an iota.

JERU. Speed ye on
With such contentions, if ye will, for me,
Ye who delight to be esteemed of men

The high-priests of all wisdom. More to me
Simple and foolish truth than the false glare
Of godless learning tricked with sophistries.

CHORUS

O matron, raised to prosperous height,
As few have been in Hebrew story,
Swiftly and with ruthless spite
Fortune hath brought ruin o'er thee
Fallen, fallen to the dust
The head that touched the starry sphere!
Sudden, a night-black tempest's gust,
All-darkening where all was clear,
Hath hurled thee low where thou dost lie,
And wrung thy heart with agony.

Alas, how little man can know
What to pursue or what forgo!
Brave warrior, but yestereve
What living man but did believe
Thy glory enviably great?
All things conspired to make thy state,
Beyond whate'er thy thought could be,
A wonder of felicity:
Ancestral lustre, wedded bliss,
A daughter lovely as thine is,
And high renown in battle won
By deeds heroic nobly done—

When, lo, an avalanche hath rushed
With sudden ruin down, and crushed
Thy envied joys: and now so low
Hath brought thee that thy deadliest foe
Perforce must pity thee; and thou,
Brooding o'er thy hapless vow,
With many a sad, lamenting moan
Fillest the star-illumined dome.

Doubtless, it is the enfolding cloud
Of error, as a dark-spun shroud,
And ignorance, wrapt in loathly gloom,
That thus the human mind entomb.
There lives not 'neath this azure sky
A man whose clear-discerning eye
Can mark the pure unsullied ray
Of Truth: not one to tread the way
Where forthright Virtue onward leads
With open mien and open deeds.
But, as the dim and scanty light,
That half dispels the lingering night
From underneath the leafy boughs
Of the deep forest, dimly shows
In interlaced perplexing maze
The windings of a thousand ways
That wind and part so endlessly
The traveller knows not which to try,
And wanders in the forest dim
All paths become alike to him:

So in life's journey still we stray,
Uncertain where to choose our way.

Impatient of inactive ease,
The warrior roams o'er lands and seas,
To buy with blood that bathes the plain,
And tears of those who weep the slain,
A name in accents brief renowned
Ere night and silence close around.
Another, whose unfruitful bed
No heir to his great wealth has bred,
Compensates his lone, childless hearth,
With musings full of cynic mirth—
With troops of suitors throngs his hall,
Wily intriguers one and all—
And gaily thinks, When I am dead,
Not one shall on my flesh be fed
Of all these vultures that distend
Expectant beaks, and wait my end.
To yet a third 'tis sweet to hear,
Growing and lessening on the ear,
The cradle's slumberous murmurings,
And childhood's lisped and prattled things.
'Tis bliss to the fond parent's heart,
Deep bliss with which he would not part
For all the wealth of Cræsus old,
Or all the sands of yellow gold
That limpid Hermus down hath rolled
To the resounding bay:—

Yet never man since time began
Has lived upon so wise a plan
As not his own designs to ban
Perchance thrice in a day.

And, lo, where comes the hapless maiden,
Foul her cheeks with briny tears :
And the poor mother, sorrow-laden,
Woe-worn at her side appears !
Alas, how little like to those
Who late were the observed of all !
If yet the tear of pity flows,
O let it o'er their sorrows fall !

The tidings brought of victory,
The glory won, upraised them high ;
So blest they seemed that nought could be
Suradded of felicity.
But yesterday, none envied so ;
To-day, how pitied ! laid how low !
Example, for all time to be,
Of earthly mutability.
Our joys are but a dust-cloud driven
By eddying gusts athwart the heaven—
So lightly fixed, so soon uptossed—
We call them ours, and they are lost.
Or like the hail, by wintry blast
On the lone mountain summits cast :

Glistening and white it lies deep-piled
O'er crag and scaur and heathland wild:
Soon as the rosy east is red,
And the sun lifts his radiant head,
Scattering aslant his fiery beam
O'er hill and holt and rushing stream,
The glistening mantle, far and near,
Dissolves, and hastes to disappear.
So pass the joys to men are given;
Such the high ordinance of Heaven.

STORGÈ, JEPHTHAH, IPHIS

Sto. O vain and mocking hopes! For thee, my
child,

I spread the nuptial banquet, and I chid
The laggard time that kept from me the day
When in all welfare I should look on thee
Wed to a worthy lord, and at thy knees
Sweet children clustering. I pictured thee
The pillar and the solace of mine age,
When with frail steps I should move feebly on
Toward my last rest, and with thy gentle aid
Should gently reach it. And it was but dreams!
Ah me, my daughter, 'twas but dreams I dreamed—
Delusive dreams, that charmed me long, but now
Are turned to bitterness. For, with cruel spite—
And why, I know not, if it be not mirth
And sport to her to thwart our purposes—

Remorseless, giving to fury its full course,
Fortune has swooped on me, and from the height,
The very topmost height, of earthly bliss
Has hurled me down insulting. One fierce rush
Has overthrown me headlong, utterly.

Thrice happy ye, whose children have been reft
By foeman's sword, or pestilence, or plague,
Or wasting famine; in whose long-wept tears
No sense of crime is mingled, and who lay
On other hands your sorrows. But, alas,
In this one crime our evil hap has mixed
The essence of a hundred—in this one!
Her father is the murderer of his child;
Religion's dread solemnities are turned
To wickedness abhorred; the altar smokes
With the warm blood of human sacrifice,
As in the lands that worship idols grim.
O, are religion's rites approved above,
Not done religiously and with holy awe?
Canst thou believe it? Nay, if thou canst believe
The favour of high Heaven is won to thee
By barbarous cruelty, strike yet again,
And mingle horribly in one red stream
Thy daughter's blood and mine.

JEPH.

Our hapless lot

Too much enfolds of bitterness of its own
To bear access of evil. Wherefore cease
To enflame thyself and me with burning taunts.
They never can recall the past, or bring

Abatement to our sorrow. Over all
 Calamity has cruel power to wound :
 To us—chiefly to me—the wound it brings
 Is more exceeding. Heavy is the load
 Of grief that lies on you ; but ye sustain
 The burden with the strength of innocence :
 While, as for me, my misery and crime
 Are fiercely linked together—for this deed
 Perforce must make me miserablest of men.
 Nor can the burden I must bear be borne
 Without the upbraiding voices of my crime
 For ever murmuring in me ; and alone
 I am compelled to do and to endure
 A hideous thing.

Sto. Compelled no otherwise
 Than as it is by choice and wilfulness.

JEPH. Would that it lay at my arbitrament,
 And 'twere not wicked to renounce a vow.

Sto. A wicked vow is not approved of Heaven.

JEPH. Mine was approved ; the battle won is proof.

Sto. What? Canst thou promise that which is not
 thine?

JEPH. Is not my daughter mine?

Sto. Thine wholly, no!

Thine is she even so as mine she is,
 No otherwise ; pledge of our wedded love.
 Because thou art her father, hast thou power
 At thy sole will to slay her, and I none
 To guard a life that is so largely mine?

O, were it lawful to make children o'er
To either parent's absolute control,
And thus by an unhallowed schism rend
The bond of wedded union—then, methinks,
Reason would urge the mother's stronger claim—
Source of her infant's welfare, and who now,
Armed with a right as strong as nature's law,
Would snatch her girl from a stern father's hand
Who dooms her to destruction. O, 'tis hard.
What? If thy daughter were to-day a bride,
And nuptial torches in blithe maidens' hands
Were this night to conduct her to her home,
Should we not both alike have bent our thoughts
Upon our child's concernments? But, alas,
The marriage yoke presses unequally;
The stronger yoke-mate arrogates too much.
The mother may not save her own sweet child;
The father may ordain it to be lost,
Lost in the grave for ever—if indeed
He *loses* what his own free choice casts forth—
What his own ruthless hand bereaves of life—
Over whose prone and bleeding corse he stands
Complacent, glorying in the parade
Of his wild work of butchery. Ah me!
What loss to him who, while he thus unbolts
The exit of the soul, and through her side
With sharp and cruel steel makes open way,
And plucks her spirit forth from where it lurks
Deep in her vitals, studies all the while

To be seen and marked, and needs no comforting?
Comforting! name it not; there is high praise
For parricide like this, and high renown
In the wild dagger-thrust that seeks her heart
And crimsons with a daughter's blood his hand!
O argue not the horror of the deed!
An air of sad religion veils it well,
Hiding the horror under Duty's guise;
And the great crime is guerdoned with great fame!

But if there be no longer in thy breast
A parent's heart, and maddening thoughts have gained
Wild mastery over thee, O yet at least
Permit a mother's fondness still to love
That which to love not were a monstrous thing;
To save that which 'twere wicked to destroy—
That which spontaneously to betray
Were worse than parricide—that which to kill
With one's own hand were an atrocity
No ravening beast could match that roams the wilds
To rend and to devour. If the dear pledge
Of our commutual love were to be shared,
We have made unfair partition. 'Tis unfair
That thou shouldst use her life and wrongly use
Her death at thine own pleasure, and to me
Should fall but grief and sorrow, sighs and tears.

O harder than the cold and flinty rock!
Or offspring shall I name thee of the oak
Stubborn and gnarled, or of the granite crags
Where wild beasts have their dens!—thou in whose veins

There runs no lingering drop of kindred blood—
Whose heart is alien to humanity—
Thy daughter weeps before thee; lo, my tears
Cease not, and on the countenance of all
Around thee thou canst mark a sombre cloud
Of grief and pity; but, woe worth the day!
Gives this stern immolator of his child one moan
To witness there is sorrow in his soul?—
Why fall'st thou not, child, at thy father's feet?
O, if thou canst by prayers or tears prevail,
Melt his hard heart, and bend his iron will.

IRN. Have pity, O my father! By this hand
That crowned thy vow and won thee victory,
I pray thy pity. If in infant days
I pleased thee well, and drew thy heart to me:
If e'er, with little arms enclasped around,
I hung upon thy neck, and thou wast glad
To feel the pendent burden; if I gave thee
Solace and joy in good and evil days,
Endearing all thy home—O cast away,
Cast far from thee, this purposed cruelty:
And let the horror which now chills our hearts
Pass from thy thoughts for ever! But if aught
Of wrong-doing toward thee be found in me,
O hide it not! It will be lightlier borne,
Whatever now awaits me, when I know
My doom is just.—Avertest thou thy face!
Unhappy me, how am I so abhorred
My father can no longer look on me?

STO. Since this poor suppliant has no power to move
A father's pity, I thy wedded wife
Entreat of thee my wedded lord this one,
This last petition: Bid me die with her!
If thou dost love me, count the gain as mine,
But if thou hate me, count the gain thine own,
Death brings with it: so shall my sorrows close,
And nevermore my voice molest thine ear.

JEPH. One victim has too much attending crime.

STO. O holy man, righteous, and innocent!
He shrinks from sin and immolates his child!

IRH. O my loved mother, cease thy plaints and
tears,

Cease thy reproaches, taunts, and murmurings;
And thou, my father, cast from thee the care
That sits so heavy on thy anxious brow.
Nor for my death enforced let bitter words
Pass and repass between you. That thou art
Unwillingly, by strong compulsion, driven
To do this deed is seen from many things—
Thy present deep dejectedness; the love,
The too-indulgent love, of former days;
And, on my part, a mind which blames me not
With crime that merits death, and least of all
Death by thy hand. Wherefore, be what it may
This hard necessity compels thee to,
I now resist no more. The life I owe
To thee, my father, and to this dear land
That gave me birth, I willingly restore.

And of thee, mother, this request I make—
I who shall make request of thee again
No more for ever: let not gloomy thoughts
Toward my father harbour in thy breast
Because of me; and give to memories
Of evils past no voice. O, if the dead
That in the hollow tomb are laid to rest
Do still retain, haply as fitful dreams
That flit athwart their long sepulchral sleep,
A cognizance of things in after days
Done in the sunlit world of living men—
Believe 'twill give me in the realm of shades,
If aught can give, a deep and pure delight
To know that ye are happy, that your years
Flow on in prosperous current, and that you,
My parents, unto whom, had I lived on,
It should have been my privilege and my care
The large debt of my childhood to repay,
And render back kind offices received,
Propping the feebleness of your old age—
Have not, in sad exchange, derived from me
Sorrow and grief, embittering all your days.

STO. Would God, if Heaven frown not on the
prayer,
That Ammon still were lord, and Israel still
Bore the long-burdening yoke. Although enthralled,
Thou yet hadst lived; or, dying, it had not been
A death like this, accursed and abhorred.
Milder had been the cruelty and rage

Of foemen than thy father's victory :
And, by a strange and lamentable freak,
We yearn to bear the yoke, and our defeat
Had saved us from disaster. Cruel still,
O Fortune, even in thy favouring gifts
Still cruel to us, at what usury
Of bitter grief and weeping thou hast lent
A short-lived joy !

IRH. Nay, better that they bear
Just vengeance, and that we, if so we must,
Hallow the altar with offenceless blood,
And with one victim thus, of free accord
And with a grateful heart, requite to Heaven
The slaughter of so many thousand foes.

JEPH. Alas, my daughter, now I comprehend
How cruel, foul, and horrible a thing
My purpose stands affirmed to. Woe is me,
Rashly to self-bereave me of a child
Such as thou art approved. But on myself
I will avenge me : for it is unjust
A maiden wholly blameless, as thou art,
Should of my madness brook the deadly fruit,
And I, the cause of all this woe, live on.
Myself I will endure the penalty
Of my own folly ; nor in the after time
Shall they that dwell around me, in their hate,
Cast this reproach on me, that in the close
And sunset of my life I spared myself
And slew my daughter—and with blood so near,

So lightly valued by me, purchased fame,
Inglorious fame, dishonoured, sullied, scorned.
But thou, who shouldst be heir to lengthening years,
Live long, live happy in thy loyalty
Toward thy father and thy fatherland;
And the return which I can never make
May Heaven richly grant thee; it is there,
In heaven, lies thy requital.

IPH.

O my father,
Break not my heart with words of tenderness,
Nor meditate delay. It must not be
That thou assume the function which is mine :
Me the vow claims, me only, and none else.
I therefore willingly give back my life,
Father, to thee and to the fatherland ;
Nor ever, while day follows day to mark
The lapse of time, shall it be said of me,
I am unworthy of my name and race :
And I am Jephthah's daughter.—Have me hence :
Bid lead me forth.—My closing hour is come,
And my soul grows into a strange accord ;
An altar-feeling in me draws me on,
And reconciles me to the altar-fires.
To death devoted, I embrace my doom,
And count the minutes long till it shall come
And waft my soul to heaven in hallowed flames.
O Earth, no more I live to thee ; no more
The daylight glads me, nor the sweet return
Of morn and eve. The altar waits for me,

And I await, ill brooking all delay,
The rite that wraps me in my shroud of fire.

And now, my mother, O how dear to me!
Farewell; farewell, my home where I have passed
My days in gladness, tenderly upbrought
To ample hopes, and destined—so 'twas deemed—
To leave thee as a blithe and honoured bride.
Ye Powers above, that fix the fates of men!
And ye, my dead forefathers! grant, I pray,
To her who died for the deliverance
Of her dear native land, her land and yours,
Gentle, and kindly welcome to her shade!
And thou, light of this sun, the last mine eyes
Shall ever look upon, farewell! farewell!

CHORUS

Maiden, that to womankind
Bringest honour, bringest fame;
Of a too undaunted mind
To falter where 'twere hard to blame:
Glory of a noble line,
Thy lot is fall'n on evil days,
And thy golden tresses twine
At once the cypress and the bays.
But though remorseless Fate has clipt
The sweetest of thy years away,
And with cruel fingers nipt
The blossom of thy vernal day;

The years of life thus reft from thee
Shall all be added to thy fame,
And many a mournful elegy
Shall long repeat thy tragic name.
Thy name shall spread to many a land,
Shall reach even where the Orient beam
Strikes fiercely down on India's strand
Or flames o'er Ganges' sacred stream.
In ages that are yet afar
The dweller by the springs of Nile,
Or he who in Sarmatian car,
The ice-wind piercing him the while,
Drives fearless o'er the waves congealed
That bridge the Danube's rushing tide,
Shall in their lays remembrance yield
Of her who for her country died;
And praise thy courage undismayed
By numbing terror of the grave,
When on the altar thou wast laid,
A maiden, yet as warrior brave.
Long shalt thou to our maidens be
A pride and sorrow; year by year
Sad dirges shall they chant to thee
With wailing voice and many a tear;
And at the low funereal heap
Where thy loved dust is laid to rest
The gathering maiden-troops shall weep
As if they wept upon thy breast:

Unmindful of their own repose,
Sweet rest shall they invoke for her,
The hero-hearted one, who chose
Death and a patriot's sepulchre.

But ye, the opprobrium of your land,
Craven in heart and slack of hand,
Too craven and unnerved by fear
To meet the thrust of hostile spear,
And in your country's cause to yield
Your life-blood on the battlefield—
Your name and memory shall die
And buried in oblivion lie:
Eternal darkness and the shame
Of all who share your race and name,
And an incumbent load of earth
Shall hide all knowledge of your birth—
Ye caitiffs, whom this age doth spurn,
Whose names no future age shall learn!

Strong's, Messenger

STO. O breaking heart! is then the last dim ray
Of hope extinct and lost? Tell forth thy tale.

Mrs. For thing so piteous, there might have been
A still more piteous ending.

Sro. Aught of good,
If it befell, 'twas Fortune's cruelty:
For false and cruel are her blandishments,

And she has skill to blend her poisoned cup
With a deceitful sweetness.—Underneath
Thy words there lies a sorrow yet untold:
Tell it whate'er it be; for grief is grown
Habitual with me, and endurance long
Has dulled the edge of pain. In Fortune's hand
Nothing is left to strike a sharper wound
Than are the wounds I bear. Of this assured,
I stand prepared for all that yet may come,
Grief-worn, grief-frozen into apathy,
And strong to suffer numbly, come what will.

MES. Hear then in brief how passed the closing
scene.—

When at the altar steps the maiden stood,
As the appointed victim now displayed—
Unwont to meet the gaze of men, who there
Gazed on her crowding—maiden modesty
O'er her wan cheeks—alas, how pale and wan!—
Suffused a glowing crimson; as if one
Should stain the purest ivory of Ind
With dye of Tyrian shell, or intermix
With the red rose the lilies white as snow.
But o'er her countenance, mingling with that blush
And visible to every eye, there shone
A fixed unfaltering purpose, and, alone
Tearless amid the weeping, meek she stood,
Serenely calm, and to her fate resigned.
The maiden, death so nigh, wept not a tear;
Beholders wept for pity—all that crowd,

Swayed by one strong emotion. Some recalled
The warrior's high emprise, the broken yoke
Of foreign domination, the lone hearth
Of the deliverer. Others bewailed
The bitter change of lot, the transient joy
Purchased with lasting grief, the treachery
Of happy-seeming things. And others wept
To mark her bloom of youth, and eyes that shone
Clear as twin stars behind a white-rimmed cloud,
And the profusion of her golden hair
Twined with the lingering sunbeam, and her firm
Intrepid bearing, far beyond the strain
Of woman's nature. And perchance on her
Nature had breathed a beauty that excelled,
To dignify with her supremest gifts
The obsequies of the heroic maid.
As the descending glory of the sun,
When speeds his fiery orb to sink below
The western ocean, all the waves ablaze
Under his dipping rim, is beautiful
More than the light of other sunlit hours;
Or as the hue and fragrance of the rose
That lingers latest of the blooming year
Compels the sense and holds the eye enthralled
With a peculiar power: even so this maid,
Her foot upon the threshold of her doom,
To death addressed, and resolute to die,
Not weakly shrinking nor with craven fear
Benumbed in presence of the closing scene,

Had deeply moved beholders, and had drawn
The eyes of the whole multitude, who gazed
Awe-struck and wondering; and every voice
Was hushed in saddened silence.

STO.

Nay, proceed;

Tell out the accomplished horror; need is none
To spare a mother's sorrows. Thou hast nought
So mournful and heartrending to rehearse
But my presaging soul still worse portrays
Than thou canst utter. All is now foreseen.

MES. Then raised the hero-maid her eyes to
heaven,

And with meek lips and voice that trembled not
Even in that cruel hour, she thus began.

Maker of all things, Father of mankind,
Eternal God, at length thy love restore,
Forgive thy people's errors, and accept
This offering in thy great benignity.
O, if to turn away thy enkindled wrath
An expiating victim needs must die,
Lo, here I stand! let the avenging stroke
Fall on me, on me only, and the guilt
Of proud and stubborn revolt from thee
Be rased and quitted by the life I give.
Ah, gladly, were it so, would I full oft
Pour forth my blood; and if therein were laid
The sole deliverance of my father's house
And of my nation, gladly would I thus
Arrest the dreadful onrush of thy wrath,

Though I should die as now a thousand times,
Slain for the altar-fire.—And now, O priest,
Thine office claims thee; do it speedily.
Nay, fear not—for he shook, with horror chilled—
Approach, and bid this soul pass from the light;
Unbolt the hindering prison-door of flesh,
And from the vow set free all whom it binds,
Myself, my father, and the fatherland.

As thus she spoke, he who had seemed so stern,
So cruel, reckless even of kindred blood,
And fiercer than the spotted tiger, crouched
To bound upon its prey, now wept amain;
And, blaming bitterly his fatal vow,
Covered his eyes deep in his mantle folds.

Dread office! All unnerved, unmanned, the priest
Could scarce unstop the outlets of the soul;
And long the silent crowd looked on aghast,
In speechless pity. But when voice returned
And found full utterance, it was not a sound
Of moaning and lamenting such as comes
Of hearts surcharged with grief, but from their midst,
Confused, a murmur of relief rose high;
And many kindly voices spoke of thee
As one—between the blandishments and blows
Of treacherous Fortune; with her rarest gifts
Caressed to-day, to-morrow crushed and scorned—
That justly might be named, in thy sole self,
At once the happiest and most miserable

THE END

THE BAPTIST
OR
CALUMNY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Prologue.

MALCHUS, *a Pharisee.*

GAMALIEL, *a Pharisee.*

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Chorus of Jews.

HEROD, *the King.*

HERODIAS, *the Queen.*

THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTER.

A Messenger.

THE BAPTIST; OR, CALUMNY

PROLOGUE

BARDS of old time, in many a fabled lay,
Tell wondrous tales of Proteus, who at will
Could take what shape he pleased, and whom no bands
Had force to bind: for how indeed bind fast
The slippery essence which this moment seemed
Corporeal and the next would melt away
Into the liquid waves, as if it were
But part of the vast waters? Vain the thought
By cord or chain to bind the elusive form
Which now would hiss a bickering flame, now roar
A lordly lion to the echoing woods;
Or growl in forest gloom a shaggy bear;
Or as a rooted oak spread wide his boughs,
Rustling with all his leaves; or in the brake,
A seeming serpent, coil his painted folds.

Sayest thou, 'tis myth and fable? I have found
The fable truer than the oracular leaves
Of Cumæ's Sibyl. For methinks I see
As many Protean shapes as I see men

Around me in the world, so nimble they
To glide out of the semblance of themselves,
And mock the eye in new delusive forms.

'Tis hard such minds unstable should control,
With influence malign, the scenic stage.
For, mark them well, those Proteans: if the play
Spring from the record of days long gone by,
They mar it with disturbing noises;
They cough, they groan, as if the stale, old theme
Were sickening to their fastidious souls.
But if the mimic scene set forth to view
Things modern or of the hour, forthwith the Old
Is what they praise, they love, they clamour for,
The old time-honoured deeds of world-renown,
That live undimmed on History's pictured page;
And with the false distaste of stunted minds,
Or ever they can know what 'tis they scorn,
They scorn the new, and hiss it from the stage.
Things written worthily and well they spoil,
Interpreting with malice; not a line
They wrong not. Sunk in indolence and sleep,
Wasting ignoble days of slothful ease,
They grudge the guerdon won by noble toils,
And spend their strength, the little strength they
spend,
In search of faults to censure or decry.
And if some slip there be, not Lynceus' self
Had eye so keen, and the poor speck stands forth

Exposed by broad condemnatory stroke:
All else, however finely thought or said,
They pass unheedingly.—The puckered brows,
And crabbed show of critical contempt,
Of such as these I reckon not; not a jot.

But if there be a fair and candid judge,
And friendly to the task we now essay
To give to lettered toils a purer strain;
One who does not withhold the stimulus
Of honest plaudits; and, since nothing born
Of the mind of man is faultless, mildly yields
To venial sins an easy absolution—
To him we bring a theme that's new, or rather
A tale of ancient time in new attire;
How, in the olden time, a man of God,
The Baptist, hunted down by sceptred lust
And crafty slanders of his enviers,
Was vilely slain though guiltless of all wrong.
In sooth, it is a tale which one may call
Or old or new at pleasure: for if things
Be ancient that befell in ancient times,
In the far distant ages of the world,
Full ancient is the matter of our play.
But if a thing that ever holds a place
Amid the freshest stores of memory
Be reckoned new, our theme is new indeed,
A tale of our own period. For while men
Shall live on earth wiles ever new shall spring.

New slanders shall be launched, and villainous hate
Crush men of worth; might shall o'ermaster right,
And innocence still be the prey of guile.

MALCHUS AND GAMALIEL, RABBIS; CHORUS

MAL. O troubled eld, and thou fast-nearing bound
Where I shall breathe my latest breath; and ye,
O Powers, that as ye list grant weal or woe—
Unkind to me, unkind!—have ye prolonged
My term of life beyond the common span
Only for this, that I might live to see
My country's servitude, and, sadder far,
The hallowed courts trodden by feet profane,
And idol-symbols in the temple of God?
And I have seen the unentered Oracle
Profaned by Gentile gaze; the beaten gold
From door and doorpost by the spoiler torn:
All that Gabinius with rapacious hand
Could grasp, or Antony's luxuriousness
Swallow in its wild vortex, all is gone.
Nay, shame to think! our substance has been made
The sport of Cleopatra's banquetings.
And, that humiliation might not lack
One pang of bitterness, a tyrant grim,
Herod, great-grandson of Antipater
A semi-Arab, sits upon the throne;
Edom rules over Judah, Sion serves
A tribute-gatherer, Jerusalem

Obeys a stranger to her holy rites,
And God's own people are made subject to
A godless alien.—Yet amid the wounds
Many and deep of this ill-fated land,
And bitter though it be to stoop the neck
Beneath a foreign yoke, and breathe no more
The air of freedom, something still was left,
Some lingering ember of extinguished greatness,
Some trace of our peculiar heaven-born lore,
From which our very foes could not withhold
Their veneration. The fierce conqueror,
With all his proud disdain, and the more part
Of Rome's empurpled senators, began
To honour and revere our Jewish laws.
Hope woke in us, long weary and borne down
With miseries, and gave us heart again.
But scarcely had we raised our drooping head
When suddenly a dreadful portent bursts
Upon our view, undreaded and undreamed.
Lo, where the Baptist comes! and o'er the hills
Of Judah rolls the thunder of his voice
Announcing new, denouncing ancient, things!
No son is this of parentage profane,
Nor nurtured amid alien rites abhorred;
By blood he is our own, of Levi's tribe,
From dedicated infancy the Lord's:
A priest his father, and himself a priest
Soon to become, so had he not preferred
To snatch the sour fruits of a forced renown,

And been content, in fitting time though late,
To reap the meed of honourable fame.

Thus, haunting hermit-wise and solitary
The lone recesses of sequestered hills,
He dupes with show of sanctity severe
The dull and undiscerning multitude.
His shaggy locks and raiment of rough skins,
His food wild-gathered in the wilderness,
And trickeries of like kind, have drawn to him
The eyes and gaze of all men. 'Tis believed—
And currently—that a new prophet has,
Unheralded, arisen to the world.
Already the rude herd crowd on his steps
And hang upon him wheresoe'er he goes;
From town and hamlet flocking they troop forth,
Cities deserted, and the desert thronged.
'Tis he alone the people now regard;
Nobles caress him, kings have him in awe.

And who so proud as he! The adulation
And folly of the senseless rout have crazed him.
New statutes gives he, like another Moses,
And dares to expiate sins and darkest crimes
With lustral water, and to adulterate
Our ancient laws with new observances.
And the more easily to win and hold
The popular favour, with opprobrious terms
He lashes, sparing none, our dignitaries,
Vituperation finding greedy ears.

Which he bids others follow; thou wilt not
Persuade me otherwise.

MAL. No good man he,
Who spurns at legalized authority,
Teaches new dogmas, practises new rites,
Rails at the appointed rulers of the land,
Reviles the priesthood : O, thou never wilt
Persuade me otherwise.

GAM. Ah, if we were
As stern and rigorous judges of ourselves
As we are harsh ones oft of other men,
Less open would our shameful deeds be laid
To popular invective. 'Tis too true—
Flatter ourselves we may, and in the haunts
Of men be lauded as if bless'd of God,
And popularly deemed the elect of heaven.
Upright, true-hearted, virtuous, holy men;
Yet over all our order rests the stain
Of darkest vices.

MAL. Grant it so, Gamaliel ;
Still, is it fit the populace should revile,
Or any turbulent knave among them all
Revile, the constituted powers? The crowd
Are born to hear, obey, be orderly,
And patiently submit to curb and rein.
The ruler, if the people err, must guide them,
Gently or sternly, to the path again ;
They guide not him—his will to him is law—
And if *he* err, there is a God to mark

The wrong-doer and punish him.

GAM.

And this

You think a fair arrangement?

MAL.

Thoroughly.

GAM. How can it be?

MAL.

Because the populace

Inherently are ignorant and rash,

Wrong-headed, blundering, and incapable:

They ever were so.

GAM.

Yet you oft may chance

On men sprung from their bosom, cottage-born,

In wisdom and capacity the peers

Of kings and nobles.

MAL.

Sayest thou? then 'twere well

We left our chair to seat base shepherd clowns.

GAM. Moses was once a shepherd; David fed

The flocks of Jesse in his native fields.

MAL. The Spirit of God gave them enlightenment,

And made them wise in all things.

GAM.

The same God

Who gave them light and wisdom can impart

Like gift to this man.

MAL.

Passing over us

To give *him* this great gift of heavenly love!

GAM. Yea, let me speak it: 'Tis not sceptred state,

Nobility of birth, or grace of form,

Or princely revenues, that God regards,

But hearts unstained by cruelty or guile

Or sensual passion: there the temple is

Wherein the Spirit of God delights to dwell.

MAL. Sayest thou well, Gamaliel? In sooth,
My mind erewhile misgave me that at heart
Thou favourest this unholy sectary.
No longer can I hold my peace, or hide
Thy doings, all unworthy as they are
Thy name and ancestry. 'Thou who shouldst be,
Of all men living, foremost to defend
The authority of our order, art become
The foremost to assail, and all in favour
Of a wild madman not yet half thy years.
Tell me, in God's name, what canst thou expect
From such attempts, or what rich prize of gain
Reachest thou after? Haply the hand that's raised
To overthrow our order and bring down
Rabbi and priest to naked poverty
Will open bounteously to thee, and heap
Honour and wealth upon thee.

GAM. Violence,
Disdain, and pride, O Malchus, never can
Defend our dignity, and deeming so
Thou missest far thy aim: not such the means
By which our fathers rose to place and power.

MAL. The ancient ways were well in ancient men:
Our own become us better. Lapse of time
Antiquates much that once was right and good.
Let every man be of his age and time.

GAM. Good waxes not time-worn; the thing that's
good

Becomes good men of every time and age.

MAL. Had we the spirit of our forefathers—

GAM. And lived we by the maxims they revered!

MAL. This scoundrel long ere now had had his
due—

Not idle threats but death with ignominy.

GAM. Let not blood stain us; 'twere a cruel deed:
Far be it from our thoughts or purposes!

MAL. If in God's service done, the deed is good,
And holy, evil-name it how you will.

GAM. Strange holiness which dooms to death a life
That's blameless.

MAL. Blameless sayest thou, of him
Who thus is turning all things upside down?

GAM. If he be wrong, confute him openly.
Why not display therein thy brilliant powers?
Encounter with him; all the odds are thine.
Thy learning, practised skill, and ripened years
May well o'ermatch his rude and untaught youth.
Haply his erring steps thou shalt reclaim,
And win the praise of all right-minded men.

MAL. This is no wound for gentle pharmacy;
Its healing must be halter, fire, and steel,
Or potent remedies severer yet,
If any be, than halter, steel, and fire.

GAM. Be this man all thou speakest him, or worse,
One thing there is which to thyself is due—
To give him friendly counsel, lest rude tongues
Should name thee readier to push o'er the brink

CHO. Gamaliel, to my thought, advises well;
Be ruled by his wise counsel.—Thou wilt not?
Yet stay!—Ah, rage, to all good counsel foe,
Clouds the clear mental vision and obstructs
The entering voice of reason.

GAM. He is gone,
Burning with anger, swollen with scornful pride.
All that I fitly could I have essayed
To calm his frenzied passions, and assuage
With gentle words the fury of his wrath.
If thanks are due for faithful counsel given,
Thanks have I earned, though thus repaid with hate.

So lives the world, deceitful, false at heart;
And on our Order rests the shameful blot
With darkest stain. Our sanctity, alas,
Worn for display, is but a deep disguise.
Thwart us, you find it so. Without reproof
The high behests of God you may contemn;
But touch our old traditions and at once
You are our foe and hated to the death.
And many ministers of death have we:
Gold, subtle poison, perjured witnesses,
Will buy, arrest, or crush your noxious life.
With false reports we stuff the royal ear;
Rumours, surmises, calumnies crowd in.
Each upon other, working to one end—
To wake distrust and heighten it to rage.
And thus give speed and force to the dread blow
Struck in a king's displeasure.—He is gone,

And to the palace wends his way, intent
On no mild measures. He will feign alarm
That heresies are springing up apace;
The rites our fathers hallowed, kept no more;
The sovereign authority itself
In danger of derision; and what else
May serve him—cloaking all his villainy
Under a fair disguise.—If this should fail,
A weapon keener still sleeps in its sheath:
“Treason, O king! Conspiracy is rife!”—
A spell to shake the pillars of a throne,
And make the monarch tremble, and his heart
Grow hard and capable of sternest things.
Treason! that fatal word red-dyed with blood
He need but speak, and speak he will at need
Aloud and boldly, and affirm that bands
Of sworn assassins aim at the king’s life;
That ruffians meet in secret conference;
That an atrocious crime is ripening;
That gatherings are held mysteriously
At dead of night to plot the time and means;
That godless factions growing in our midst
Give growth and strength to private discontent.

Such phantoms he will raise, or gloomier still,
So violent is his nature, ever prompt
To counsel acts of barbarous cruelty.
These poisons, bred in an envenomed heart,
Infect the royal ear; they fall not there
Inert and idly: ’tis the vice of kings,

The blot with which few kings have been unstained,
To listen credulously to informers' tales.
Pure fictions are believed, the cruellest
Believed most readily; fantastic fears
Are conjured up in their own minds—in minds
That turn as vanes to every changing breath
Inconstant Rumour blows.—Faithful advice,
Wise warning, who shall give? You are but scorned
As timid, feeble, dull, and spiritless;
No counsellor for a king. The good and wise
Are not atop; the scum and froth are there
In proud pre-eminence. The very names
To virtue given of yore we now reverse,
With some poor gain; for splendid virtues *we*
Have none to be misnamed; but splendid titles.
These have we, these we proudly bear, with these,
Names of high office and great reverence,
We dazzle and deceive the uncultured throng.

Touching this prophet, would to heaven we were
More heedful what we do, more self-restrained.
If he is sent from God, no might of man
Can frustrate or resist the will supreme:
But if with deep-laid guile he seeks to crown
Some bad ambition, quickly shall he fall
Transfixed with his own sword.—Let each unfold
The matter as he lists. My counsel is,
To such as may think well to follow it:—
Stain not your hands with guiltless blood; still more,
Beware lest even righteous blood be shed

In your rash hour. The cruel things we do
To others may in after days recoil
On our own heads as bitter precedents.—

Has Herod not ferocity enough
But we must set the torch to his hot mood
And speed his all-ungoverned fury forth,
To range with wilder havoc?

CHORUS

Deep is the night that in its dark recesses
Closely enfolds the dim-eyed mind of mortals!
Still veiled in darkness spend we life's brief seasons
Fast from us gliding!

Modesty feigned conceals the shameless-hearted;
Piety's semblance hides the irreligious;
Storm-shaken bosoms counterfeit the tranquil;
Guile seems sincerity.

He who of all men looked most grave and steadfast,
Perfect example of strictest moderation,
Rages with fury uncontrolled, and fiercely
Flames into anger.

Fierce as the blast that hot from Etna's forges
Hurls rocky fragments swiftly whirling upwards;
Fierce as the fires that make Vesuvius' entrails
Glow as a furnace.

Even so fiercely burns the vengeful fury
Driving this Rabbi against the blameless Baptist—
Bent to arrest by truculent accusal
Truth all defenceless.

O lust of glory, source of many evils:
Guest of vain bosoms where conceit doth feed thee!
O praise, rich guerdon misbestowed on virtue
Outwardly seeming!

Soon as dominion o'er the mind thou gainest,
Straight thou enchantest the soul with soothing poisons,
And, far exiling reason, thou perturbest
All inward counsel.

Piety and Truth and Modesty all shun thee;
Faithfulness shuns thee, and Justice—she who lingered
Last upon earth of all its guests celestial—
Till vice distained it.

O, if some power uplifting from our eyelids
Clouds that now darken gave us to contemplate,
Naked to view the cares that fill the bosom,
Full in light baring deepest hid concealments,
Then should we see, in that small cavern harboured,
Many a monster, shapes uncouth and wondrous,
More than in distant climes the Nile can nurture,
Ganges or Libya teeming with fell portents—
More than the rugged Caucasus can shelter,
Denuded in its darkness.

There wouldst thou gaze upon the spotted tigress,
Blood-stained with rage; the tawny lion's fierceness;
Gluttonous wolves, with ravin never sated,
Still for blood thirsting, hungering still for carnage;
Basilisk exhaling baleful poison round it;
Aspic that kills with deep envenomed slumber;
Scorpion dreadful for its curving sting; and
Crocodile rushing through the sounding sedges,
False tears a-trickling down its flinty cheek-plates;
Craft of the fox; and Nubian hyaena's
Treacherous gambols.

Piety pretended masks inhuman tyrants;
Stoles with broad fringes cloak unholy passions:
Worth dwells sequestered, clad in poorest raiment,
Under a rustic cabin's lowly roof-tree;
Sells not herself for proudest of earth's titles;
Laughs at the madding tumults of the forum:
Plaudits of the people utterly despises;
Haunts no great patron's client-crowded portals;
Deeply embowered in rural scenes secluded,
Life's silent years, unknown to all, she spends in
Peace and contentment.

THE QUEEN, HEROD

Qu. Sluggish of heart, still dost thou not perceive
Thy kingly power is trembling to its fall?
Art thou so blind thou canst not yet detect

The treachery that seeks thine own deep harm?
For give this demagogue but one year more,
And vainly shalt thou menace him with bonds,
Imprisonment, or death of infamy.
Already proudly he surveys his power—
The hordes that muster trooping to his voice.
What king with all the pomp of royalty
Can boast like retinue?

HER. What canst thou fear
From men unarmed, though many?

Qu. If thou suffer
These secret gatherings to be held unchecked,
There is no class of men may not be feared.

HER. But not this man; he but instructs the
people,
Who crowd to him by no sedition led.

Qu. The wider spread the faction, all the more
The threatening danger.

HER. O, it cannot be:
The charge of faction glances off this man,
So high his sanctity.

Qu. Such wicked things
Oftimes lie hid beneath that sombre veil.

Hen. Not thence; it is from men in high command,
Great lords and purpled satraps, that kings dread
The coming of offence and treachery.

Qu. Sour-featured hypocrites may be traitorous.

HER. Unarmed and poor, whose drink the running
brook,

And law, religion, and the authority
That sits enthroned in the high sovereign prince
Are scorned by the rude rabble and defied!
Beware lest falsely-seeming lenity
Draw thee away from what is just and right.
More closely scanned, the lenity that *seems*
Will stand disclosed as utmost cruelty.
Sparing one factious, God-forsaken knave,
Thou bringest all to utter ruin—all
Whom so industriously he urges on
Against thy life. Imagine it is come,
That which must come ere long—the multitude
To arms aroused; the land from end to end
Wrapt in the devastating flames of war;
The fields untilled and waste; the cities burned;
And maiden innocence to force a prey;
And battle-strife with dubious issue waged,
'Mid wounds and death—when rebel lawlessness
Shall thus have burst through every check and bound,
Then wilt thou bitterly, too late, condemn
This foolish clemency.—And, lo, he comes,
The head of this death-striking pestilence!
Behold him! there the great reprover stands!
Interrogate him; his own rankling tongue
Will tell thee more, or I misjudge, than fame
Has yet divulged. Nor is it wonderful
That there are evil men who lightly hold
Thy sceptred majesty; its gentleness
Makes insult safe and seems to woo contempt.

HER. To have great power and yet restrain its use
Within due bounds of reason is, methinks,
A kingly and right noble quality.

QU. Ha! is it so? and shall this wretch restrain
Thy royal power to its just exercise?
Shall thy proud rule stoop to be curbed and reined
At his good will and pleasure?—Were it thine,
The spirit of a king—

HER. Nay, it were well
For thee to go; leave these affairs to me.

QU. Ay, well for me to go; lest I should hear
Anew, as oft before, deep insults cast
Upon me to my face. When cruel wrongs
Done to a queen are left without redress,
Without revenge, and base-born men are held
In higher estimation near the throne,
What hope may meaner suppliants entertain
That *their* wrongs shall be righted?

HEROD, JOHN, CHORUS

HER. So; she is gone. Then let us talk the while.
Be not amazed or count it passing strange
That, wounded where the hurt gives keenest pain,
A woman is incensed more than is meet—
A high-born lady, rich and powerful,
And, to crown all, a queen. For mine own part,
None better can bear witness than thyself
How tender of thy welfare I have been.

The hate of all the people of the land
Strikes at thee, clamouring for thy punishment;
The nobles are aggrieved, the priesthood growl.
And what it is that wakes the angry voice
Of public discontent few words will tell.
Thou railest on all ranks with biting tongue
And scurrilous invectives; far and wide
Scattering the deadly taint of thy new doctrine,
Thou dost deceive the simple multitude,
Unskilled in questions of our ancient laws;
With turbulent speeches thou imperillest
My royal crown and the tranquillity
Of the whole realm. Thou bidst the soldiery
Obey no more their captain; bidst the people
Obey no longer the great Emperor—
Pledging thy wild, fantastic word the while
That a new kingdom shall arise wherein
A foreign yoke shall weigh them down no more.
And thus deluding them with idle hopes
Thou stirrest up their old rebelliousness,
Nor leavest them to follow undisturbed
The gentle ways of quiet and content.
And, as if all the miseries we have borne
Were not enough, thou dost provoke again,
Fool that thou art! the arms of mighty Rome.
Nor doubt I thou hast dared behind my back,
Since to my face thou hast not feared, to charge
Me with incestuous wedlock, and hast striven,
What in thee lay, to embroil me with my brother,

And kindle hatred of me o'er the land.

Yet more, as if too few were thy misdeeds,
Who hast dared all things against all alike,
Thou art now making war on Heaven itself;
And darest not to attempt the overthrow
Of the old hallowed rites, observed so long,
The safety and the glory of this realm.
These things the people murmur everywhere,
All blaming me as too remiss to guard
And vindicate our old ancestral laws,
The institutions which our fathers held
In love and reverence. Still, no act of mine,
With rigour tinged, has yet been done, to lay
Arrest upon thee; nay, even now, I swear,
All such befriending as a friendly judge
And kindly has it in his power to show,
It shall be shown thee in no niggard wise.
For I am no bloodthirsty tyrant, born
Of an Assyrian or Egyptian sire:
One natal soil gave birth to you and me;
One soil has nursed us from our infant years;
And not the meanest life in all the land
Is taken but I feel as if a limb
Were torn from mine own body, my own blood
Seems rushing forth from me. A kindly judge
And fair thou hast in Herod. If thou canst
Refute what else is laid to thee, I swear
To pardon all that thou hast yet inveighed
Against my house or me: so shalt thou know,

The public voice assenting, that no hurt
Of private nature moves me: public wrongs,
These seek I to redress; my private wrongs
I pass unheeding. Mayest thou so wash out
All other charges that thy innocence
Shall leave no ground for my severity.

Cho. Hold to this tenor, and thou shalt be dear,
And still in distant days shalt live renowned.
Deem not that gold or troops of soldiery
Can fence a kingdom round with rampart strong
As that which loyalty and love upbuild,
Under the sway of a just-ruling king.

Jo. He to whom God entrusts the reins of State
Must needs hear many things; to credit all
Needs in no wise. Self-interest, envy, grief,
Favour, or fear oft heighten or subdue
The colours of the truth. To high-born men
And humble have I spoken; if reproof
Has stung one man of them as too severe,
Let him arraign the life that he has lived
Ere speech of mine be challenged. 'Tis my wont—
Is and has ever been—to reprehend
Publicly evil deeds in public done.
Doctrine or deed of mine ne'er shunned the light;
From darksome lurking-place I never struck;
And men are not the foes I grapple with,
But men's iniquities. When soldiers came
And asked how best to serve the king and God
With equal loyalty, I charged them thus:—

To accuse none falsely, do no violence,
Nor steal, nor overreach by craft and guile
The simple and unwary, and to stint
Their greed to the just limit of their pay.

'Tis said I stir up hopes, hopes big with change
And revolution; but the hopes I preach
The roll of ancient prophecy inspires;
Where ye yourselves have found them, as I found:
I stir none other; and the man lives not,
Of all the many thousands I have seen,
Who can stand forth and say he learned from me
To scorn his Prince and love disloyalty.
Such things has rumour spread, or blinded rage
Invented in its headlong eagerness
To do me hurt—refuted easily
By the mere naked truth.—But sacrilege!
This also lies against me! That I honour,
Devoutly honour and observe, the old
Time-hallowed ordinances, needs, methinks,
No surer token than that, openly,
Clear as the shining light, he comes not forth,
The accuser of my crimes, to lay them bare;
But mutters low in secret nooks obscure,
Fit haunt of phantoms.—But there is still more:
Thou canst not lawfully have thy brother's wife!
Yes, I have said it, take it how thou list.
But well bethink thee whether it be right
To please the king or God, compelled to choose.
And would it were the mind of all whom kings

Hold in their closest friendship, to speak forth
The salutary truth, not flatteries
Smooth-tongued but hurtful. O, how many ills
And sore disquietudes would cease to come,
Their entrance barred!—If I have said erewhile,
With speech more free, more true, than courtiers use,
Aught that concerns thee, 'twere not well to scorn
The warning voice that pleads for righteousness.
Rather, let all that's good and just in thee
Give heed to one who lives but to defend
Things that are just and good; and who once more
Bids thee restrain thy power within the bounds
Which righteousness prescribes. God is supreme,
The King of all, of thee and of all kings,
And over all men executes his will
With sovereignty far transcending thine.
My life is in thy hand; do as thou wilt;
But know that Heaven decrees the like for thee—
Just Heaven whose judgments err not, whose decrees
Bring the due recompense of all that's done.

HER. When thou ascendest to the stars, then talk
Of heaven's affairs; while yet thou lingerest
Below on earth, bear with earth's lawful powers.

Jo. The thrones of earth I reverence; to earth's
kings
I yield obedience; but my fatherland
Is in the eternal realms; and heaven's great King
I worship and adore.

HER. How wonderful

The obedience unto kings which makes a king
Thy subject and would bind him to thy laws!

JO. Were I a lawgiver, I should decree
That nations shall be subject to their kings,
Kings subject unto God.

HER. Let us have done :
Enough of wrangling ; take him hence again.
'Tis an affair perplexed and intricate ;
And until all be seen in fuller light—
Open and clear—I shall determine nothing.

CHO. Whoso avers that from a monarch's speech
Can be discerned the real purposes
Hid deep within his breast, let him know well
He trusts a mirror filmed with dimming breath,
Obscuring, breathed on purpose to obscure.
O may kind Heaven in pity yet bring all
To good event ! but still the boding mind
Shrinks from the view of what its fears foresee.

HER. To be a king, O hard and troubled lot !
Can words declare, or thought's keen glance survey,
The load of ceaseless misery that rests
Upon a king ? The many hold us free
Alone of men, sole blest of all mankind—
Kings, whom relentless poverty pursues,
Whom apprehensions torture, and a round
Of bitter servitude galls to the quick.
The common throng have blessings manifold
Denied to kings. What they desire or dread
Or love they dare tell forth without restraint.

Free from alarms, their simple stores supply
Their simple wants, and life is undisguised.
But we, oft as we meet the public gaze,
Must wear a seemly mask; to suppliants
Must promise smooth and sympathetic things;
Listen distressed to the distressful tale;
Indignant, to the tale of cruel wrong;
Must hide revenge in a dissembling breast,
And let our grudges sleep till fitting time;
And menace loudest when oppressed the most
With harassing and heart-benumbing fear.
A gentle prince is scorned; a harsh, abhorred.
Subservience is the root of sovereign power.
The people, to be ruled, must be obeyed:
At my unhampered will I can do nought.
If I arrest this prophet's wild career
And still his voice for ever, I offend
The thousands of my subjects; if I say,
"Let him live on," I jeopardize my crown.
What then to do? Can there be doubt of it?
Reasons of state must have preponderance.
Herod is Herod's first and nearest care.
And be it that the sceptre is not held
Save by subservience to the popular will,
Were it not folly of the wildest strain
To wreck the sovereign power through overzeal
To win the people's praise. The unstable crowd
Rage or rejoice at random, joy and rage
Coming and passing unaccountably.

'Tis now my steadfast purpose blood shall flow
To strengthen my assailed prerogative.
The angry discontent that may arise
Will speedily be allayed.—Why linger I?
If this far-reaching evil be allowed
To spread still wider, soon it will outgrow
All check or remedy. He has presumed—
This messenger of heaven, forsooth, presumes—
To call my nuptial bond incestuous!
Shall I endure it? Let this go unlash'd
With the sharp scourge it loudly cries upon,
Not there will the effrontery of the man
Arrest itself. He will aspire, and soon,
To sway my sceptred hand to his decrees;
Soon will he bind with chains the captive limbs
Of monarchs; soon will burn with fierce desire
To be no more a subject but supreme;
Will give the law to sovereign kings, and whelm
All order in disorder. There is need
Of sharp and instant remedy to beat down
A mounting evil. The new-kindled blaze
Must be extinguished ere it gather strength
Unquenchable. It is but to invite
Fresh insult, to bear tamely earlier wrong;
And should occasion give me leave to strike
With general assent, I shall not fail
To seize the favouring mood; but if I may not,
All peril to the crown with my whole power
Must be resisted, cost what life it may.

Let Malchus prate of laws, and learnedly
Discuss entangled questions, never yet
Resolved, nor haply to the end of time
Resolvable: these things concern me not.
Only, let this one royal law be held
Inflexibly, and recognized by all,
That, over and beyond enacted laws,
Whate'er I will is lawful and is right.

CHORUS

Builder of this vast earth-sphere,
Whose sovereign will all things revere—
The heavens with glittering fires inlaid,
And earth with varied flowers arrayed,
And heaving ocean's reflux tide:
Hath not Fame, wherein abide
Deathless the deeds of bygone days,
Carried to our ears the praise
Of thy glorious works of old
When thy puissant arm back rolled,
As down tossed on the tempest's wings,
The mustered power of mighty kings;
And by the deep-fixed roots uptore
Proud nations that are feared no more,
To plant us in their conquered land—
A soil which not our spear or brand
Or strength or wisdom for us won;
'Twas Heaven's protecting grace alone

Led us safe through ranks of foes
To the rich promise of repose.

And art not thou the King adored
Of Isaac's race! of Israel Lord!
God of the Hebrews! who hast led
Our warriors o'er the trampled dead
Of vanquished foemen to the prey
In their perfidious camps that lay.
Oft, placing our high trust in thee,
Our Captain and Defence, have we,
Boasting no prowess of our own,
Brought to our country wide renown.

Dost thou, O Father, utterly
Thy once loved people cast from thee?
And are we left the scoff and taunt
Of every hostile miscreant?
Lo, piety is held in scorn;
Religion to the dust is borne;
The kingly robe of purple dye
Enfolds astute hypocrisy.
Victim-like, thy saints are laid
Under the axe's cruel blade,
And 'neath the swiftly trenchant wound
Their sacred heads roll to the ground.
Our prophets by a tyrant's sword
Are slain; our sorrows but afford
Mirth to spiteful enemies;
And 'neath devotion's seeming guise

Some, worthy of the dungeon cold,
Rim round their brows with regal gold,
While, worthy of that golden rim,
Some pine immured in dungeon dim.

Arise, and to thy people bring,
O Father, needed succouring;
And let the foe behold thy hand
Outstretched as when, from Arab strand.
Our fathers saw the parted sea
Rush deep o'er Egypt's chivalry:
Or when, with eyes divinely clear,
The servant of the fateful seer
Saw all around on Dothan's steep
The fiery steeds and chariots sweep.

Thee, Lord, let all the earth, made free
From error's deep obscurity,
That quenches in the darkest gloom
The light which should the mind illumine:
Let earth, from where its hills first gleam,
Gilded with the orient beam,
To where the rays of sunset red
A parting glory o'er it shed—
Acknowledge thee, with one accord,
The sole Almighty Sovereign Lord.

MALCHUS, JOHN

MAL. In truth, so stands the state of mortal men
That were the heavens to offer thee thy choice,

It would perplex thee what to seek or shun.
Power, honour, wealth, thou wouldst for thee and thine,
Gifts that have oft brought ruin in their train;
And for thine enemy thou dost invoke
Exile, imprisonment, and bonds, though these
Oft bring to him *great glory*, and to thee
Irreparable loss: so have I learned
By mine own bitter proof, no need to seek
Remoter instances. For when, withdrawn
To the lone ridges of Judæa's hills,
This upstart Baptist drew to him the hearts
Of the whole credulous multitude as with
Some potent fascination, I stood forth
The champion of the Pharisees—alone,
When all held back; nor did I cease to use
Every expedient that might serve my will
Till cold hard iron bound those guilty hands,
A public prison walled the troubler in,
And the whole palace with the echoes rang
Of my loud accusations. All too clearly
Bonds, prison, accusations profit nothing;
So strongly has this foul contagion seized
The minds of all men, and so deep have all
Drunk in this mortal poison, that they turn
His sufferings into honours, and bemoan
The perils that enfold him.—Me they load
With execrations wheresoe'er I go;
Point at me with the finger; glare on me
With scowling faces: while this shaggy knave,

This bold blasphemer, who has overturned
The landmarks of old time, and quite effaced
All just and orderly distinctions, stands
Prime favourite, and before his prison-doors,
Deep-bolted, friendly troops keep patient watch,
Waiting his guarded coming-forth.—Alas,
None upon earth more wretched are than we,
Who, all things else neglecting, dedicate
To public cares our undivided powers.
Whoso makes this surrender, let him know
He ill bestows his favour; for it is
The perverse custom of the people still
To honour the unworthy, and to spurn
The great and noble.—Whither shall I turn?
Which grievance first bemoan of all that are?
Whom make the target of my wrath? To whom
Bring, in this quarrel, my confederate aid?
• The people in their godless folly worship
This pseudo-seer; the Rabbis are perplexed;
The king forbears; the nobles heed not; I,
Alone, even with these shoulders I uphold
The tottering pile of our ancestral rites,
No hand of man assisting; I alone
Lament the evils that afflict this land.

What then determine? to desert my post?
Betray our laws and dearest sanctities,
And mine own Order—to its forfeiture
Of awe and reverence; and bear to be
The laughter of mine enemies? Good sooth,

This shall I bear; for what else *can* I now?
Am I alone to stoop beneath a load
Which all refuse, and cast myself before
The down-rush of this vast State-ruin? No;
Let God look to his own. Self-interest
Now rules the lives of men, and I am bound
To mine own self by closest of all ties.
If I misgovern till disaster come,
I fall beneath the ruin I have made;
And they who favour me the most while yet
I stand, when I am down will be the first
To lift the heel against me. Should I rule
And prosper, it is still a thankless toil;
And all I win is envy. Now, though late,
I laud the counsel of Gamaliel—
Too late, unless perchance 'tis ne'er too late
To approve the wiser thought and follow it.

Men may accuse my inconsistency
Herein; 'twere better so than execrate
My rashness after the grim deed was done.
Lo, let men think as best may please them; I
Will shake me free of these perplexities,
And patch up peace with this mob-orator—
Or prophet is it?—he will not, methinks,
A simple, unsuspecting man, refuse
My tendered amity. But if he prove
Refractory, there is no stratagem
But I will use to have it thought by none
That 'tis by my device he perishes.

If I regain the popular esteem,
'Tis not the worst of endings, be the end
Otherwise how it will.—And see, he comes!
In sooth, 'tis he; and mark the crowds that hang
Obsequious on the blasphemer's heels;
And we the while, 'mid silent emptiness,
Sit idly and unheeded in the heart
Of a great city's thousands.—But 'tis well
To hear this Master; something he would say.

Jo. Great Ruler, Maker, Judge of all the world!
Thee all that earth brings forth, or air enfolds
Within its yielding bosom, or the sea
Beneath its sounding waves doth nourish—all
Acknowledge thee as God; and as their Source
And Origin they know thee, and obey
Spontaneously and immutably
The laws which once for all thou hast ordained.
At thy command Spring scatters o'er the fields
Her painted blossoms, Summer yields her fruits,
Autumn pours forth her stores of ruddy wine,
And Winter clothes the hills in glistening snow.
As thou hast given them charge, the winding streams
And rivers downward to the ocean roll
Their mass of waters, and the tide-swept sea
For ever ebbs and flows; the moon illumines
The brow of darkness, and the burning sun
Flames o'er the waking world—unresting orbs
That pause not in their office day nor night,
But with immutable fidelity

Hold on their radiant way. Nay, there is nought
In heaven or earth but with goodwill obeys
The Sovereign Lord, loves the All-loving Father,
And, in such service as it can achieve,
Shows forth its zeal for him who reared on high
The fabric of this glorious universe.

But man alone, though bound far more than all
To do his high commands with high delight,
Stands forth rebellious, sole apostate thing
Of all on earth; spurns the behests of Heaven;
Rejects the curb of salutary laws;
Hastes to all vilest things with reckless speed;
Makes appetite the rule of what is just;
And what his might can compass, *that* is right.

MAL. So far, thy principles are sound and good.

Jo. Now marvel I so much that Gentile tribes,
Far o'er the world and under other skies,
Should wander lost in a bewildering maze
Of error; more I marvel that the race
Who vaunt themselves the heritage of God,
And with revilings loud all others brand
As sinners and profane, do yet themselves
Live in such unrestraint and wickedness
As in no other region upon earth
The sun in all his circuit looks upon.

MAL. In sooth, all thou hast said, thus far, is true.

Jo. Nor on the unstable multitude alone
Rests this reproach. The Levite in his robe
Of snowy white, conspicuous from afar;

The Scribe, puffed up with knowledge of the Law;
And you, ye Elders, whose ripe years do wear
A venerable semblance—all are gone
Astray, and wander far in tortuous ways.
The orphan's and the widow's cause is lost
At your tribunals, and the rich oppress
The undefended poor; just judgment and
Unjust alike ye make your merchandise.

MAL. I burst with wrath, to hear this silently.

JO. But, O ye Rabbis, who in sanctity
And learning would be thought to overpass
All others; and ye consecrated Priests,
That hold the seats of dignity; and thou,
Chief Pontiff of the sacred brotherhood:
Ye tithe each pot-herb that the earth doth yield;
Mint, anise, cummin, garlic, fennel, rue,
Your nice and delicate scruples tithe them all.
But as for reading or inculcating
The maxims of the prophets, oracles
Inspired of Heaven, or as to showing forth
The path of holy living, ye are dumb;
Placed in authority although ye be,
From you no guiding voice is ever heard.
Dumb dogs, ye bark not out one timely note,
Nor drive away the ravening wolves that prowl
Around your folds. Wolves say I? Ye are wolves
Of fiercest nurture; ye devour the flock;
Ye clothe you with the wool, ye drink the milk,
And with the flesh ye sate your gluttony.

The flock ye feed not, 'tis yourselves ye feed.

MAL. Hence, all conciliation, to the winds!
Befits it *me* another moment's space
To suffer the insulter thus to rail
Upon our Order? Nay, were God from heaven
To bid me, on some high commission sent,
Patiently listen to such words as these,
Rather would I revolt 'gainst heaven's command
Than hear them spoken. But enough; refrain
I can no longer.—Hark thee, worthy man!
Rare chieftain of the crowd! is this in truth
Thy sage philosophy; and in such wise
Instructest thou the simple multitude?
Thy words are fierce and wild.

Jo. They touch not thee,
If thou art upright, and thy heart unstained.

MAL. It ill beseems thee to revile a priest.

Jo. To give to evil things an evil name
Is well, and therein no reviling lies.

MAL. Young art thou; riper years should rule the
young.

Jo. Rather, at every age, should Heaven rule all.

MAL. Heaven charged thee, then, to utter forth
those things?

Jo. Things that are true, Truth bids all men speak
forth.

MAL. Yet many has it greatly profited,
Discreetly silent, to leave things unsaid
They might have spoken truly.

Jo. I may not stay
To reckon profit that is linked with sin.

MAL. Then seems it to thee sinful not to say
What yet thou sinnest saying.

Jo. It were in truth
Sinful and criminal to look idly on,
And see so many thousands perishing,
Whom I might lead to safe and quiet paths.

MAL. Thou! are not *we* the shepherds of the flock?

Jo. Yea; if to feed be to devour, ye are.

MAL. Busy thyself about thine own affairs;
Ours, not concerning thee, may be let pass.

Jo. Things that concern my neighbour touch me too.

MAL. Who art thou, pray, to claim this oversight?
Art thou the Christ foretold in ancient days?

Jo. I am not the Christ.

MAL. Art thou that Prophet?

Jo. No.

MAL. What then? art thou Elijah?

Jo. I am not.

MAL. If thou art none of these, the promised Christ,
The Prophet, nor Elijah, who art thou
That rashly dardest to inaugurate
A baptism of thine own, unheard till now?
Say, whom shall we report thee?

Jo. But a Voice—
A Voice upon the lonely mountain heights,
Crying, Prepare the way, make straight the paths,
Soon to be trodden by your coming Lord:

MAL. How pert
And insolent! Conceal it as thou wilt,
All know the source of thy unbounded rage:
Thy fixed ambition is to grow and thrive
Upon our disrepute; thou wouldest make
Our detriment thy path to wealth and fame,
And rise to power by evil practices,
Our overthrow thy rising. We are not
Thy dupes; thou hast but one, and thou art he.
Nor art thou first of men that hath essayed
The part of a deceiver, self-deceived:
Would thou wert last to bear the penalty!

Or rather, would that better thoughts were thine,
Born of my admonition ! that, whereas
Thou hast been guide to lead full many wrong,
Thou may'st, with wiser heed, thy steps retrace
And bring the wanderers home ! Oft have I seen
The garb of sanctity severely worn,
Conspicuous, the better to persuade
That they who wore it were of simple tastes
And men of well-ruled minds ; and I have marked
What time they rose to greatness by such arts,
How step by step they laid their nature bare,
And openly threw off the integrity
Once feigned so well, and then, along the course
Of their hearts' lusts, careered with slackened rein.
If thou dost think by that bad path to climb
The steeps of glory, thou dost greatly err,
Unskilled in earth's affairs and ill-informed.
Not *that* the path to honour and renown.
Experience has taught me, surest guide,
And age, the parent of experience ;
And by my voice experience and age
Thus speak to thee, so wilt thou lend an ear :
"Better shalt thou advance thy wealth and fame
Were safety more than splendour made thy aim."

Jo. If I speak truth, do right, what living man
Has cause to interpose and silence me ?
If false in word or deed, thou, who art wise,
Enlighten my unwisdom.

MAL.

Thou shalt rue

Thy stubborn courses when thou diest the death.

JO. Go, menace death to such as fear to die!

MAL. Live I, proud man, not long shalt thou rejoice
In this thy contumacy; thou shalt learn
Ere many days the sort of thing it is
To scorn the aged, and to scourge the Scribes
With thy sharp railing, and to irritate
The Rabbis by thy petulant attacks.
And since thou lightly holdest our good will,
Haply thou yet shalt know what 'tis to feel
The weight of our resentment.

CHORUS

The robber bent on darksome deeds
Shuns the pale moon's watchful beam;
The assassin, when his victim bleeds,
Abhors the torch's conscious gleam.
The sick child loathes the remedy
In bitter wormwood that doth lie;
And the green wound when dressed again
Shrinks from the healing salve in pain.
So he whose secret heart is gnawn
By evil things that harbour there
Detests of truth the brightening dawn
That lays his inward trouble bare.

And, O ye gloomy hypocrites,
On whose stern visage grimness sits,

Whose hearts are darker still with stain
Of the love of guilt-won gain!
Hide though ye may, and hide full long,—
So blind and credulous are the throng—
Your secret villainies; and though,
Veiled under seemly outward show,
The rank putrescence of your mind
Escape the loathing of mankind—
You too, O hypocrites, you too
Doth Conscience with reproaches urge,
And your tormentor, hid from view,
Remorseless wields his fiery scourge.
The cavern of your own dark breast
Moans to the voice of your unrest.

O pure in heart, happy are ye!
For never at the inward bar
Stand ye arraigned of villainy;
Nor scourged with fiery whips ye are
By the Avenger that doth dwell
Within the bosom's narrow cell.
O pure in heart! on earth that wone
None are blest but ye alone.

MALCHUS, CHORUS, THE QUEEN

MAL. The king I count not on; he has betrayed
Alike the public interests and his own
By his ignoble scheming; for he schemes
To please the multitude and win their breath

By base compliances; and, scheming so,
Has striven the while, though under gentle guise,
To keep me in reserve for public hate,
And wreak his private insults at my risk.
For either issue thus he stands prepared:
For should the Baptist's death wake o'er the land
Wide indignation, quick! my gory head
Shall still the angry tumult—mine the crime;
But should the deed that lays in bloody shroud
The chief of this new faction make no stir,
Then shall the king have compassed his revenge
Triumphantly, and all the honour his.
Thus with deep policy do kings set forth
Alternate spectacles of subjects slain,
And hold it sport when the opposing chiefs
Of mighty factions drag each other down.
A measure hailed with general acclaim
They vaunt as their own work, and take the praise:
Our toil but tills the ground whereon they reap.
But should the popular breeze veer round and blow
Adverse to all they strove and thought to win,
The measure so cried down and scowled upon
They relegate to their subordinates,
Leaving with them the blame; and guiltless blood—
Guiltless but valueless, blood of the vile—
Must turn accusing voices from the throne.

Sole partner of my sorrow, there remains
The queen, enraged as is a tigress robbed
Of all her dappled whelps; because this man,

The Baptist, in the presence of the king,
Has blamed the breaking of the covenant
That earlier bound her to a wedded bed;
And openly denounced the unlawfulness
Of wedlock with a living brother's wife.
The affront is recent; and while yet her wrath
Burns with revengeful fury, I will set
Ablaze her fierce resentment, and feed high
The flame with such incitements as are fit:
And, lo, even to my wish, yonder she comes!

CNO. Now fire lends aid to fiercely burning fire;
Poison to deadliest poison lends its aid:
The hour of supreme danger is at hand.

MAL. All hail, thou shining glory of the realm!
O queen, twin-sovereign, worthy alone
To fill the highest seat of majesty.

QU. Good greeting to thee also, Rabbi Malchus;
But why lookst thou so sad? may I not know?

MAL. For that which vexes thine own soul I grieve.

QU. Perchance; yet say more openly the cause.

MAL. How canst thou patiently endure to see
Thy dignity despised, the kingly name
Stript of its awe and dread authority;
And the puissant sceptre made to stoop
To the base rabble's scorn and contumely?

QU. What can I do? Hast thou a remedy?

MAL. Yea, in thy wrath—so were thy heart aflame
With wrath that might befit thy noble birth,
Thy spirit and the consort of a king.

Qu. It has already been, the thing thou sayest.
I am rent with rage, I weep, I chide, I fret;
But wrath nor tears avail me; all my plaints
Are scattered idly on the wandering wind.

MAL. Wert thou in honour due as wife and queen,
Would the king leave thy wrongs thus unavenged?
Thy wrongs! they are his own.

Qu. Thou seest, Malchus,
The popular devotion to this man.
Haply the king has thought the dungeon cell
May break his stern and vehement spirit, and
Abridge the range of his audacity.

MAL. Thou thinkest the fierce spirit of this brigand
Subdued, or like to be, by dungeon chains?
Think it no more. Still fiercer is the rage
Of the caged wild beast that has burst its bars
Than of its fellows which have ever roamed
The forest depths far on the pathless hills
Where they were nurtured. What is there this man
Will dare not, set at large, whose very bonds
The people worship? Anger is not allayed
By acts that chafe, but is incensed the more.
Touched by the scourge of public ignominy,
Unmerited or so deemed, the sufferer
Is roused to fury.

Qu. Rather say, the man
Under this gentle usage will grow mild.
His life stood forfeit to his obstinacy:
To set him free by royal clemency

Should win his heart—for life to all is dear.

MAL. This gentleness, with him, is cruel wrong;
The sense of it will rankle in his mind—
Who oftener will remember he was bound
By thee, than afterwards by thee unbound.

QU. Thou dost announce a harsh and rugged nature.

MAL. Inmate of almost every human breast.
Thy kind deeds bring thee love that lives not long;
Thy unkind bring thee hate that never dies:
Nay, there be few but hate even benefits
Linked to the memory of their own misdeeds.
Oft as thy gracious act shall come to mind
The Baptist will remember his own crime;
And if he deem that, guilty in thy thoughts,
And unforgiven still, he is enlarged
For politic ends, what else can he believe
Than that his punishment is but deferred,
And vengeance slumbers not but bides its time?

QU. Fierce natures are subdued by kindliness.

MAL. Not his; by indurating habit long
Confirmed, and hardened to the thing he is,
Far easier to break him than to bend.

QU. Counsel me; what to do I know not well.

MAL. If you can trust me, all shall be set right,
And cleared of troublesome entanglements.

QU. Show me but what is wisest, and the word
Shall speed to its fulfilment, undelayed.

MAL. By action well-informed, far-seeing, firm,
And not by let-alone, are great affairs

Successfully conducted.

Qu. If no speed
Be made by action wary and well-advised,
Were it not better even to sit still
Than toil to unavailing weariness,
And draw the ridicule of ill success?

MAL. Success is found by finding out the way.
Oft when the mightiest blow fails of the effect,
Mere pressure fails not. Where 'twere vain to storm,
Siege brings surrender. Not at the first wound,
But after many deep and toilsome strokes,
The oak's huge leafy pile falls to the ground.
The war-ram brings not down the castle wall
At the first impact, nor till many blows.
Things you may once have thought impossible
Time brings to pass; and oft when reasoning
Is foiled, importunacy wins the day.
Urge, then, your suit; enforce it with your tears;
And mingling prudent counsel, just reproach,
Anger and fond caressing words, besiege,
Thus and in every way assiduous,
Your lord the king: let no occasion slip.
If open dealing serve not, covert wiles
May better thrive. For me, my purpose stands
Firm and determined, never to desist
Or rest until the work in hand be done.

CHORUS

At last deep malice, and the scourge
Of rage remorseless, onward urge
At speed this holy prophet's foes,
His brief career in blood to close.
Not for him in innocence
Or saintliest life is there defence;
For what can saintliest life avail
When hate-born calumnies assail,
And wicked craft the plot has laid,
And tyranny lends cruel aid?
In spoken truth and stainless life
There lies no safeguard in this strife.

Yet these the conscious spirit raise
Superior to evil days;
And the prophet left alone,
By no armed follower waited on—
So many shafts aimed at one heart,
And wiles deep-planned with deadly art—
Surveys the dangers round him laid
With look and heart all undismayed.
No rugged oak when from the north
The icy storm-wind rushes forth,
Or rock-cliff which the sounding sea
Beats rhythmic, more unmoved than he.

O sacred Truth, bright essence thou,
To whom all loyal spirits bow;

Thou whom dark wiles nor open force
Can turn one footbreadth from thy course;
Alone there is no fear in thee,

Let Fortune send her darkest hour;
Thrall of no evils that may chance to be,
Thou armest with unconquerable power!
Invincible, the very hand of Fate,
Mistress of life and death, thou dost abate
Of all its dreaded might;
And on the soul that hath thy light
Not heavily
Doth lie the hand of saddest destiny.

CHORUS, JOHN

CHO. I shrink from meeting him, and linger thus:
How can I pour into the prophet's ear
This saddest of all tidings—misery
And woe but to rehearse? Lo, where he stands
Before the prison gates!—Peace to thy bosom,
Child of the holy, holier still than they!
Our only hope to see the reign of peace,
And innocence as in primeval days,
Returning to the earth! O be thou ware,
And quickly to thy safety look, while time
Yet suffers thee! With deep and subtle craft
The Rabbi Malchus seeks thy deadly harm;
The queen, a prey to indecision, burns
With secret but infuriated rage;

The courtiers fan the smouldering inward fire;
The king dissembles; others dread to speak
The thing they know. The moment is at hand
That brings them to the utmost jeopardy.

Jo. What is the danger?

Cuo. 'Tis the final close,
The term of death, that presses hard on thee.

Jo. Is all the impending evil summed in death?

Cuo. To mortal man no ampler ill can come.

Jo. Though tyranny and treacherous guile should
cease,

And nevermore return to vex mankind,
Mere lapse of time will bring the term of death
Dreadful to wicked men, to innocence
A thing to be desired.

Cuo. Ah me! though thou
Art careless of thy safety, let some thought
Of us still weigh with thee. A little slack
This high-strung spirit. Bend the royal will
By sad entreaties. Friends there are of thine
Will plead for thee, and haply not in vain.

Jo. Am I not doing even as thou wouldst,
Assiduously?

Cuo. Heaven keep thee to this mind!

Jo. A needless prayer; it is and long has been
My thought and purpose. It is known the king
Hastes to englut his vengeance with my blood;
And I refuse not. Is there surer way
To appease his wrath than when, on either side,

The things we would and would not are the same?

CHO. Mere words!

JO. What wouldst thou then that I should do?

Two kings there are, whose high behests conflict—

The one in heaven, mild, merciful, and good;

On earth the other, ruthless, passion-swayed,

A wicked tyrant. This holds o'er my head

Menace of death; that bids me banish far

The fear of death, and promises reward

To such as can outdare the tyrant's stroke.

The one is able to destroy the body;

The other body and soul alike can rack

With torment of inevitable fire.

Placed thus between two high opposing wills,

Which ought I to obey?

CHO.

If thou let pass

The occasion that now seeks thee, afterward

Thou canst conciliate Herod nevermore;

But God is always reconcilable.

JO. Yet is not mocked: the longer 'tis restrained,

The wrath of God—and he is slow to wrath—

Flames into fiercer burning in the end.

CHO. Deem'st thou so lightly of appointed things

Which Heaven has willed that all of mortal breath

Should hold in dread? O, sacred is the bond

That binds in fellowship body and soul;

And lest occasion should be rashly seized

To break this bond asunder, God hath joined

Each to the other in a loving league,

Body and soul reciprocally dear.

Jo. Of death I lightly deem not; but I shun
 By momentary death a death to which
 The years shall bring no end. The light of life,
 It is God's gift; and I at the recall
 Unmurmuring restore it back again.

Cuo. And dost thou willingly relinquish too
 Thine orphaned children, nurtured in thy word?

Jo. Never can they be orphans who believe
 God is their Father.

Cuo. And thy kindred, they
 Do move thee nothing? nor the tears of friends?
 Kindred and friends whom thou art leaving thus
 Defenceless to a tyrant's cruelty.

Jo. I leave them not; rather am left of them,
 And go the way ordained from earliest time
 To meet my death. 'Tis the fixed ordinance
 All are born under, whosoe'er behold
 The pleasant sunlight. To one goal we haste,
 Still journeying toward the grave; and the swift days,
 Ever as they pass, all speed us thitherward.
 To evil men death is a punishment—
 'Tis so appointed; but to all good men
 The harbouring inlet where life's voyage ends;
 Term of a lengthened life, and yet the gate
 Of entrance to a life that has no term;
 The gate that gladly ushers in our steps
 To the bright realm of pure, eternal light—
 Not dead—not dead, but rather born anew

To higher life and larger destiny.
It is the exit by which mortals leave
Their prison-house, and into life pass forth,
Life everlasting. All our fathers trod
This way before us, an unnumbered host ;
We all shall follow them, our path the same :
His speed who would retard ? In the fleet race,
What runner, rushing from the barrier,
Is not at once rapt onward to the goal
In thought and strenuous purpose ? Who that, in
The night's tempestuous darkness, sore is tossed
Upon the billowy main, would not be glad
To come within the haven's sheltering verge,
Where the loud waves are still ? Or who, compelled
To roam an exile o'er the cheerless wastes
Of an un-native soil, is grieved to hear
A voice announcing early his recall
Home to his fatherland ? So, glad at heart,
My course concluded, at the very goal
I deem myself arrived, and from the surge
Of a now well-nigh ended life I gaze
Shoreward, and see the land. From alien fields,
Soil of my banishment, I turn me home,
Homeward I turn me, where I shall behold
The first and best-loved Father—him who girt
The land about with waters, and outstretched
Around the earth the overarching sky ;
Who rules the unerring motions of the orbs
That roll in the blue firmament serene ;

Sole maker, ruler, and upholder of
All things that are, and unto whom all things,
Living and dead, alike do live. As flames
Spontaneous whirl on high their eddies light,
As waters downward glide in ceaseless flow,
And all things to their native element
Are ever tending; so the spirit of man,
From heaven descended, here below doth pant
For God, the Father of all things, dweller in
Eternal light; whom to behold is life;
Whom not to see is death beyond all death.—

What should obscure my aim or slack my speed?—
Though rugged mountains swept by ice-cold winds,
Or skies with never-lulling storms convulsed,
Or seas perturbed with tempests, barred my way,
Or tracts from burning heat impassable,
Should I not still speed on—speed thitherward
Where I shall see so many noble dead,
Kings, leaders, prophets, sages, and just men?
Whom to behold should I not urge my way,
A thousand deaths obstructing? Thus my soul,
Free from this earthly prison-house, the doors
Burst open for me, longs to wing its flight
Whither all on earth or late or soon shall go.
For what is life prolonged but lingering toil
And suffering in a prison hard and drear?

O Death, sole lightener of our heavy load,
Refuge of sorrow, rest from trouble, thou
By few of mortal men yet recognized,

The good thou art; terror of evil men,
Desire of just: receive me; O receive
Into thy bosom this frail body, wrecked,
Storm-broken; and conduct me to the home
Of everlasting rest, far, far away
From violence and craft and calumny.

CHO. O happy thou, in this thy fortitude!
And wretched we whom coward apprehension
Robs of this triumph! What there needs must be,
Thyself well knowest; and we urge no more;
This only more—Farewell! a long farewell!
For ever, and for ever, fare thee well!

CHORUS

There is a discord between mind and mind,
A strife that leads into opposing ways:
Death dreads he not, but meets with heart resigned,
Whose life no worthiness of death betrays;
While the death-worthy, if he chance to hear
The faintest rustle of death's pinions nigh,
Straightway his cheek is blanched with craven fear,
And his limbs tremble, he so dreads to die.
As evil men from death ignobly flee
Through fire and flood and trackless rock-strewn
waste;
So just men, longing with the dead to be,
Deathward through every danger nobly haste:

For death has blessings known not to the vile,
 And is companioned with a life more blest.
 Wholly we die not; the funeral pile
 In its fire-surges burns us not; there rest
 Unscathed the soul's immortal powers; and we,
 Sealing the ethereal steeps, our native zone,
 Find sure abodes, for ever ours to be,
 Among the shining hosts in heaven that wone.

But guilty souls that perish in their crime
 In burning sulphurous lake shall have their lot,
 By inward torments vexed to endless time,
 Where their worm dieth, their fire quencheth, not.
 Torn by the envenomed fangs of fierce remorse,
 And agonies of unfulfilled desires,
 O wretched ye, who end your earthly course
 Whelmed in the unextinguishable fires !
 And hence the sinner's fear, the hope that cheers
 The righteous spirit, and the noble waste
 Of this frail life, while that which not appears,
 The life imperishable, is embraced
 In ardent aim and expectation high,
 And beckons the life-loser to the sky.

O fleeting life, by fond illusions swayed ?
 Enchantress, strong to charm and to beguile ?
 By thy soft blandishments we are betrayed,
 And 'scape not from our greatest ill - while :

Escape we find not, though 'tis near, and wide
The door stands open; but thou shutst it fast,
And 'mid thy strong enchantments we abide
Thy willing prisoners—well if at the last,
Through thy obstructions manifold, we come
To the loved haven of perpetual peace;
Where War's wild terror and the mustering drum
And the loud clarion's blare for ever cease;
Where no rapacious pirate frights the main,
No truculent robber lurks in forest lone,
Nor mightier plunderer, a crown to gain,
Madly fair lands lays waste and ruin-strewn.
None there oppress the poor with miseries
Untold, to feed their own magnificence,
That they, sole blest, may loll in pampered ease
Darlings of luxury and indolence;
None, wretched if they knew, to purchase power
And sounding titles that are but as breath,
Barter men's lives in furious battle-hour,
And with their blood drench the red field of death.
No; war is hushed, and strife has ceased to be,
And all is peace and sweetest harmony;
And smiling joy and deep tranquillity
And guileless worth are there in every breast;
And nevermore to darkness speeds the day,
Nor evermore is felt death's cold arrest;
No moan of pain is there, nor wailing cries,
And tears are wiped for ever from all eyes.

O earthly house, our sweet abiding-place,

Our prison, yet we hold thee all too dear,

Thy bonds enchanted O at last unlace,

And let the soul regain her native sphere,

The heaven-born soul which to thy bosom comes

Forgetful of its birth, and glad to mate

With thee degraded—such a spell benumbs

All memory of its primeval state

Full of deceits, integument of clay,

Vanish, resolved into the dust thou wast!

That, back to heaven restored, in light's pure ray

The soul may orb its powers, all error past;

Die, and alike give to thyself release

From sufferings and toils that bring thee harm,

And to the soul give joyful surcease

Of troubles full of sorrow and alarm.

What gift she would. It is the Baptist's head
Delivered in a charger she will ask :
And 'twill be given her ; I am well assured
It will, unless I much misknow the stuff
The king is made of. Nothing loth, I wot,
Himself unblamed, he will divert on me
The popular abhorrence of the deed.
And so the deed be thorough, I will bear
Gladly the hate of it, and counterpoise
The hate with sweetness of achieved revenge,
The blot with the rich gain.—Is it not shame
A woman should be cruel? Shame it is,
Were it not more, and doubly more, a shame
To leave the wrongs of princes unavenged.

But see, the king and damsel are come forth,
And this way wending. My long cherished hope
Is near my grasp, and all the more I burn
With apprehension : Heaven prosper all.

HEROD, DAMSEL, THE QUEEN

HER. Hast thou well weighed the guerdon thou
shalt ask?

DAM. Yes; if the promises of kings are sure
And kingly.

HER. Have no fear; the word I pledged
In presence of the assembled banqueters
Shall stand inviolate. Ask of me the half

Of kings is to command.

HER.

Not what is wrong;

Right only.

DAM. What perchance were wrong before
The king's command makes right.

HER.

The force of law
Sets limits to the king's prerogative.

DAM. The prince's pleasure evermore is right:
And 'tis not laws set limits to the king;
The king, supreme, can overbear the laws.

HER. So should I be a tyrant, not a king,
And execrated by the general voice.

DAM. A voice that dreads the king's authority.

HER. Dreads, but still mutters.

DAM.

Quiet it with the sword.

HER. Terror is no defence to royal power.

DAM. The royal power is ripe for overthrow
That weakly yields impunity to crime.

HER. Securely stands the throne where loyalty
And love of all its subjects guard it round.

DAM. That kings be loved there is no utter need;
But utter need there is that they be feared.

HER. A load of hatred burdens cruel kings.

DAM. A mild and gentle king is held in scorn.

QU. The drift, methinks, of all this colloquy
Is this, that promises are idle breath.

Thou seem'st to me not yet to comprehend

The functions of a ruler. If thou deem

That honour and shame cling to the acts of kings

Yield to thy wife her hated enemy;
Or if thy wife be nothing, yet fulfil
Thy promise to my daughter, as becomes
A father and a king.

HER. It shall be kept
With perfect faith; but were she swayed by me
She yet would frame her choice to wiser thoughts.

Qu. If swayed by me, her purpose will not change.

HER. Is it even so? Why must I needs have
sworn

So rashly? What infatuation came
To bind my honour to a girl's caprice,
And all my prospering, kingdom, treasures, all,
Even life and death, put in a woman's power?

Qu. Let steadfast truth confirm the pledge of kings.

HER. Refuse I may not; but what yet I may,
Once more I warn and beg that your revenge
Urge you not on to what would ill become
Your birth and sex and royal eminence.

Qu. Enough; leave in our charge what yet remains.

HER. Be not too harsh in ought you shall decide
Against the prophet, or the blame is yours,
And yours shall be the peril.

Qu. Be it so.—

Now is insulted majesty avenged,
And in such wise that never in future days
Shall it lie open to contempt or scorn.
Now shall the stubborn multitude be taught
To speak of kings with due restraint, or learn

The lesson to their cost. And they shall find
That, be the king's high ordinance right or wrong,
The people must take all submissively,
The right and wrong, and make no murmuring.

CHORUS

O realm of David, and ye towers that keep
Jerusalem within your strong defence;
And thou, O temple on Moriah's steep,
The crown of Solomon's magnificence!
Whence comes this frenzied rage against thy seers?
And whence this cruel thirst of righteous blood?
Pattern of worth to the remotest years
Thou shouldst have been, and, lo, thou long hast
stood
Unmatched in wickedness; and evil lore
Alone thou teachest, guile and lawless force,
Theft, robbery, and murder; and no more
The olden piety holds on its course.
The priesthood with foul blots is darkly stained;
The people have forsaken the great Lord,
Father of all things, and bend, unrestrained
By the deep folly, down to things abhorred;
Idols of sculptured stone and graven wood,
To these the victims bleed, the altars burn;
The maker kneels his own similitude
That to his cry no answer can return:

Life from a stock he asks, and words doth crave
Of dumbness, so his mind is darkened o'er;
The rich begs of the poor, lord begs of slave,
And the old hallowed rites are loved no more.

City of blood! the blood of prophets slain
Speeds on thy doom at the great Judge's throne;
Loudly the miseries of the poor complain,
And widows fill the air with wail and moan.
Just vengeance waits thee, certain to betide
Unless all auguries are falsely scanned;
For He who curbs the insolence of pride,
Lord of the sky and of the sea and land,
Looks from on high and never doth forget
The tears and cries of men whom men oppress;
And his avenging hand will render yet
Swift judgment on thy nameless wickedness.

The foeman comes, and his victorious bands
Shall hurl to earth the walls and towers wherein
Thy trust is placed defiant; and thy lands,
Homestead and field, rude warriors shall win:
Thy vineyards the rich vintage shall outpour
Of all their clusters to a foreign lord;
And where the fairest pile earth ever bore,
The temple where the Highest doth record
His name and dwelling-place, sublimely rears
Its turrets mingling with the azure eaves,
The alien husbandman in coming years
Shall guide the plough and bind his harvest sheaves.

Therefore, while the clemency supreme
Gives space for thy repenting, cast away
The errors of thy life that's past; nor deem
The idols of the heathen help or stay.
Forsake them utterly, those idols vain,
And the fierce thirst of kindred blood forsake;
And the accursed hungering restrain,
The hunger which the love of gold doth wake.

Ah, still impenitent thou wilt remain,
And still pursue thy old and evil ways;
Nor wilt thou banish from the hallowed fane
The idol-gods whom blinded Gentiles praise.
Still shall thy hands with kindred blood be red,
Still the gold-hunger shall thy heart consume;
And the dark path thy wayward foot doth tread
Shall lead thee to thy just and speedy doom.
The deadly pestilence shall feed on thee;
War, hunger, leanness, penury shall crush
Thy shattered strength, until, most righteously,
On life's last dreadful hour thy guilt shall rush.

MESSENGER, CHORUS

MES. Where may the comrades of the prophet be,
If haply thou canst tell? Tidings I bring
Of woe and sorrow.

CHO. Stay thee here a while,

If that thy haste be not the more : I fain
Would know thy burden : briefly utter it.

MES. Fain to know that which, known, will grieve
thee sore.

CHO. Howbeit, grudge not one short moment's stay.

MES. Knowest thou the guerdon that the damsel
craved?

CHO. The prophet's severed head brought in a
charger.

MES. The prophet's head so brought she bore away.

CHO. O deed of horror ! all the godlike force
And grace of that majestic countenance
Are withered in a lamentable death ;
And lips but lately breathing with the breath
Of heaven's high inspiration now are closed
In everlasting silence. 'Twas a deed
To move the wrath and pity of mankind.

MES. Why weep ? Laments are idle ; let them
cease.

CHO. Around me when I see and hear of things
Deeply to be deplored, must I not weep ?

MES. O, if the dead must be bewept and moaned,
Let those bemoan the dead whose hopes are dead,
And buried with the buried, in one grave ;
And who believe not that, brief term o'erpast
Of sleep sepulchral, the interred dead
To life shall be restored, life without end.
Let misery's own children weep the dead,
And only those who, dead, are miserable.

Over no man on earth has Fortune power
To render him a child of misery;
And though like term of life wait all who live,
Righteous and wicked, yet shall no man die
An evil death whose life has been lived well.
O, if the mode of exit might be held
A test of misery, then shouldst thou deem
Many of the saintly fathers of old time
Who died by violence and in ignominy,
By cross, or headsman's blade, or flood, or fire,
Proved but too clearly miserable men.
No; the lifeguard of Truth, who fights and falls
For his religion and ancestral laws,
A high example leaves for noble minds
To honour, and to think of in their prayers,
When most they strive to brace their manliest powers—
A life to follow, and a death to die.

Cuo. Surely 'tis even so as thou hast said;
But we, less wise—whom errors in repute
And sympathy with other minds mislead—
Shunning our fates, rush on our fate the while.
The wave submerges whom the fire hath spared;
Pestilence kills where shipwreck failed to drown;
The warrior, home unscathed from all his fields,
Is slain by pining sickness. To defer,
Not to avert, our fate the heavens permit;
And day by day, for death deferred, we yield
The usury of ailments, perils, griefs,
And troubles manifold as life drags on.

A life prolonged is but a lengthening chain
Of evils, knit together link by link,
Unceasing till we reach life's utmost bourne.
Yet bound though thus we be, and chained to ills,
We feel not, miserable that we are, our bonds,
And dread far more our exit from this life
Than life's long servitude of suffering.

THE END

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